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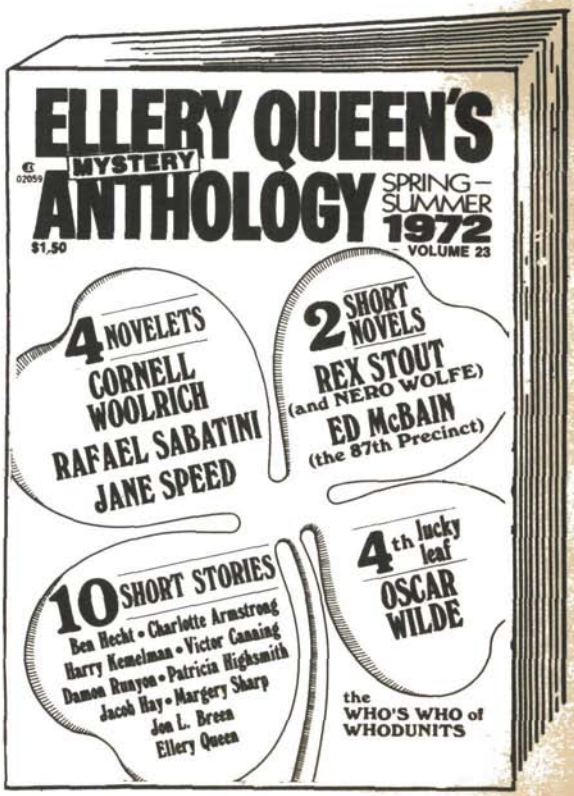

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

13 NEW stories

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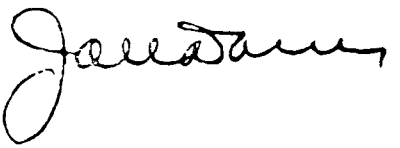
An Important Message From the Publisher of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

As the President and Publisher of Davis Publications, Inc., publisher of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and 32 other Special Interest magazines, I wish to bring to your attention the seriousness which I and other magazine publishers feel towards the impending prohibitive 142% increase in Second Class postage rates now coming before the Postal Service Commission.

No doubt you are all familiar with the recent demise of the well respected *Look Magazine*, not to mention such other representative and important periodicals as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Venture* and *Woman's Home Companion*. Although there are many reasons to explain the success or failure of an individual title, the fact remains that a 142% increase in the area of transportation is so prohibitive that to absorb it would be financial suicide for my own company as well as most, if not all, of the other respected publishers. In spite of our long practice in attempting to maintain the cover prices of all of our titles and in some instances actually reduce them, this impending increase is of such magnitude that I would have no alternative but to increase the price that you, our valued customer, pay for this publication.

As a professional businessman I am quite prepared to live with normal inflation which hits each and every area of our company, but I am sure you will agree that normal inflation does not include this type of prohibitive increase. Then you might ask, what can you, the reader, do about this situation? Well first of all, you might read the following editorial which we are reprinting with the approval of *The New York Times*. If you agree with our position, then I would urge you to contact your local Congressmen and make your feelings known in the only way that it can possibly have an impact, through the legislative process. For our part, we are contacting our own legislative officers as well as our principal suppliers, who, like ourselves, will be hurt if this type of increase is passed along to the publishing industry.

Yours very truly,



JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

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Death by Postal Rate

In an effort to make the United States mails a self-sustaining business, the Postal Service may succeed only in making a free press appreciably less free. The new agency has a legal mandate to support itself, but the rate increases it is seeking are excessive in terms of the general economy, disproportionate as between the respective mail services and dangerous to the very existence of many of the country's leading magazines.

The Postal Service is aiming for an increase of 24 per cent for third-class mail—chiefly the bulk-mail advertising matter that bows down the postman and litters the land—but 145 per cent for second-class over a five-year period. It is evidently the Service's intention to force second-class users to bear the brunt of making the mails pay off.

The theory seems to be that bulk mailers should be protected from a heavy increase because the Service already makes a profit on them. But if it is to make a profit at all, this is precisely where it should be made—on that segment of its clientele that is overwhelmingly commercial, not on second-class mail which is in large part informative or educational.

The second-class mailing privilege, entitling the user to a specially low rate, was conceived as a public service. Historically, it was regarded as the small price that democratic government should pay to stimulate that public discourse without which democratic government can hardly exist. Newspapers such as this one will to some degree be adversely affected by the proposed steep rise in second-class mailing costs; but by far the most acute sufferers would be the periodicals, in some cases to the point of extinction.

Undoubtedly there are magazines that would find it hard to make a case for their contribution to public education, but others have provided a source of information as well as a national forum which the country cannot spare. This is especially true of journals of opinion, which are sometimes as seminal in effect as they are small in circulation and low in advertising.

If the proposed boost in second-class rates threatens the life of even the great news weeklies, as it does, it all but dooms the small but indispensable intellectual gadflies. If the independent Postal Rate Commission sanctions anything like a 145 per cent increase, Congress should take a long look at the law whereby it converted a failing Post Office Department into an ailing Postal Service.

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a NEW suspense story by

JULIAN SYMONS

A pickup in the rain on a dark road late at night can be dangerous for a traveler. Julian Symons tells us about a case in point in a masterly study of suspense . . .

Now, join Donald en route to a gay holiday in France when suddenly he becomes involved in a deadly battle of wits . . .

PICKUP ON THE DOVER ROAD

by JULIAN SYMONS

The milestone, just visible in the rain, said Dover 41. Donald's mouth pursed and he began to whistle *The Song of the Skye Boatmen:*

"Speed, bonny boat, like a bird on the wing,
Over the sea to Skye.
Carry the man who was born to be King
Over the sea to Skye."

Not to Skye, but to Calais. In a light pleasant voice he fitted words to the tune:

"Carry the man who was born to be young
Over the sea to France."

To be young, he thought, to be young and happy. He remembered for a moment the row with Charles, but nothing could keep down for long the bubble of his high spirits. Rain splashed on the car's windshield, the tires made sucking noises on the wet road, the wipers echoed his thoughts by saying *a new life, a new life.*

Quite wrong, of course; he would return to England—this was nothing but a short holiday. He said aloud, "One of the *things* about you, Donald, is that every time you do something fresh you think it's the beginning of a new life."

Perfectly true, but a little silent reproach was in order. He knew that talking to himself was a bad habit, so he turned on the radio and found the plum-voiced announcer halfway through the news:

"*. . .yet another government scandal. Mr. Michael Foot called on the government to resign.*" Pause, slight change of tone. "*A murder in Kent. An*

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elderly woman, Mrs. Mary Ford, was found murdered this evening in her house on the outskirts of the village of Oastley in Kent. She had been brutally attacked and beaten, and the house had been ransacked. Mrs. Ford was something of a recluse, and it is believed that she kept a considerable sum of money in the house. Police investigations are continuing."

Oastley, he thought, can't be more than five miles from there now. He was listening abstractedly to an interview with a beauty queen when he became aware of something in the road and in the next moment he realized that the something was human. He began to go into a skid, corrected it, stopped, opened his window, and shouted, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

A grinning face appeared, wet, snubnosed, cheerful. "Flashing a torch."

"I didn't see it. I might have—"

"Can you help me? I've had a breakdown." There was no car visible in the headlights. As though answering an unspoken question the man said, "Down that side road you've just passed. I think the rear axle's gone," he said and laughed again, the sound loud and meaningless. His voice was deep, coarse. "Look, can you give me a lift? There's a café a few miles down the road. If you drop me off there I can make a phone call."

Donald felt a momentary reluctance to let the man into the car, overcame it, leaned over, and opened the passenger door. The man took off a wet raincoat, threw it on the back seat, and got in. The interior light showed him as a rather squat figure, perhaps in his late twenties, a little younger than Donald, with thick brows and the corner of a thick mouth turned up in what seemed a perpetual smile. Then the door closed, the light went out, and he became just a darkly anonymous figure in the next seat.

"Dripping all over your car," he said. "Sorry."

Donald did not reply. The incident had somehow disturbed his serenity. He drove off and found himself whistling the song again. Then the voice beside him revived the euphoria he had felt a few minutes ago by saying, "Going far?"

"Into the sunset and beyond," Donald said gaily. "That's if it weren't night and raining. Dover, then across to France. Driving off the quay in another country, that's a wonderful feeling."

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"Must be. Never done it myself. You can do with a bit of a change in this weather."

Sheer pleasure in what lay ahead made Donald talk. "You know, in England we always talk about the weather, I do it myself, it shows what a boring nation we are. In France that sort of thing simply couldn't happen—there are a thousand better things to talk about. God, I shall be pleased to get out of this smug country."

As soon as the words had been spoken he regretted them. "Not that I'm unpatriotic, mind you. This is just a holiday. Still, I shan't be sorry to get out of England in March. It's just that I know everything will be *different* in France—hotels, food, even the weather."

"I know what you mean. Wish I was coming with you. Haven't been abroad for five years, and then it was just for the firm to a sales conference in Frankfurt. Trouble is, when you've got a wife and two kids it comes expensive, going abroad. So it's Littlehampton instead. Every year. Relatives there. You married?"

"No," Donald said, a trifle sharply.

"Lucky man." Again that laugh, loud and meaningless and somehow unlikable.

"Why lucky?"

"Don't know, really. It's just when I think of you single chaps, with a flat in London, time your own, do what you like, go where you like, I feel envious sometimes."

"I didn't say I had a flat in London." Again Donald spoke more sharply than he had intended. "And I work, too. I'm a writer. A free-lance journalist."

"Free lance, there you are. Free lance, freedom." A smell of drying clothes pervaded the air. Donald could almost feel them steaming. "This breakdown's serious for me, I can tell you. I'm a knight of the road."

"What's that? I didn't quite—"

"Commercial traveler, old man, and the bus is my steed, as you might say. Without it I'm sunk. Point is, I've got to get to Folkestone tonight—got an appointment there in the morning. If they can get my car going, well and good, but I doubt it and if not I'm in trouble. I was wondering." Donald sensed what was coming. "I was wondering if you could drop me off at Folkestone. Not out of your way, and it would be the most tremendous help to me."

There was something about the man that did not seem genuine, and instinct told Donald to refuse; but that seemed churlish. "I suppose if

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your car's still out of action—well, all right."

"Very very decent of you, old man. We'll just look in at that café for five minutes so I can phone a garage. Must go through the motions."

Something was troubling Donald and suddenly he realized what it was. "What do you travel in?"

"Woolens, all sorts of woolens."

A flurry of rain blurred his vision. Headlights loomed up dazzlingly and were gone. "Samples?" Donald asked.

"How d'you mean?"

"You've got no samples."

The pause was fractional. "Left my case in the car. Overnight bag, too. Didn't want to drag 'em up the lane. You get used to traveling light, you know, in my game." Another pause, a longer one this time. Then, as though to divert Donald's attention from the missing sample case, the stranger said, "Shocking business, that murder."

For a moment Donald could not believe his ears. "What murder?"

"Just a few miles away, place called Oastley. Old woman had her head bashed in, nasty business from the sound of it. They'll get the chap though. I wouldn't mind betting somebody saw him leaving the house, and then we shall get 'Police are anxious to interview Joe Doakes,' and we all know what that means."

Donald said absently, "You seem to know a lot about it."

"Only what I've heard. But I'm interested. I'll tell you why. Murder is easy." He gave that mechanical laugh, then said in a different tone, almost of alarm, "What are you stopping for?"

"You should keep your eyes open." Donald could not keep a tinge of malice out of his tone. "There was a sign that said single lane traffic. Part of the road's under construction."

"Oh, is that all. Well, as I say, murder's easy. I mean, look at the two of us. You give me a lift, you don't know me from Adam. Nobody sees me get in. I put a gun in your ribs, tell you to pull over and stop. I shoot you, toss you out of the car, drive off, leave the car somewhere, take two or three train and bus rides to get rid of the fuss, and I'm away. With whatever's in your wallet, of course. Don't worry, old man." His loud bark sounded like the rattling of keys. "But it's been done, you know. Think of that A.6 job."

"Hanratty, you mean? They caught him."

"If he was the one who did it." The laugh again, but this time it was only a chuckle.

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Then Donald felt a pressure on his arm from which he jerked away. "Sorry. Am I putting you off your stroke?"

"Every murderer makes a mistake. Fingerprints, footprints."

"I ought to have put my gloves on." The laugh now was like a donkey's bray. "You've got to forgive me, it's just my sense of humor. That café's round the next bend if I remember right, on the left, stands back a bit. But murder is fascinating, don't you agree?"

Donald did not reply. I want to get the night ferry, he told himself; whatever he says I must avoid becoming involved. He found himself whistling the song in an attempt to drown the other man's words.

"I mean, the psychology of it," his passenger said. "A chap goes in a house, bashes up an old woman in the hall, gets her money, fifty or a hundred quid. Do you reckon it's going to worry him, what he did? I don't."

Along the road to the left, lights shone. It had stopped raining. There was no sound when he switched off the wipers, except the engine's throb and the suck of the tires. Donald cut off the tune in mid-whistle.

"A case like that," the other man went on, "it could be the good old tramp at the door who leaves his dirty paw marks or footprints over everything. Or it could be the real artist, the kind of thing that interests me. But as I say, this one doesn't impress me that way. I reckon it was just run-of-the-mill and we'll be reading that the police want to talk to a one-eyed farm laborer from Rutland." He broke off and said in a tone of some anxiety, "Hey, here it is, here's Joe's."

Donald took the car into the open space in front of the café. He sat with his hands on the wheel, uncertain what to do.

"Thought you'd missed it." His companion stepped out. "Coming?"

Donald decided there were things wrong with the man's story. He would have to do something about it. Reluctantly, he got out. The night air was fresh, cool. As he followed the other man into Joe's he could not help noticing his shoes. They were thickly caked with mud. Had that come just from walking up a lane?

Plastic-topped tables with sauce bottles on them, a few truck drivers sitting on tubular chairs, a smell of frying food—Joe's was not the sort of place to which Donald was accustomed. His companion, however, seemed quite at home.

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"Two cups of tea, nice and strong. And can you do us sausages and chips?"

The man behind the counter had a squashed nose and a cauliflower ear. "Right away."

As his passenger turned, red-faced and smiling, Donald felt angry. "Nothing to eat, thank you."

"We'll both feel better with something hot inside us." Sitting down at a corner table, smiling across it, his face was revealed as round and ingenuous. It was given a slightly sinister look by a cast in the left eye.

"I told you," Donald said, "I don't want anything to eat. And anyway, I never eat sausages." He was dismayed to hear his own voice come out as shrill, pettish.

"Right, old man, don't fret. Just one order of bangers and chips, not two," he shouted across the room. The ex-boxer raised a hand like a veined slab of beef in acknowledgement. "The name's Golightly, by the way. Bill before it, but friends call me Golly."

That is a familiarity to which I should never aspire, Donald thought. The phrase pleased him. He said rather less aciduously, "I thought you came in here to telephone."

"That's right." Golightly got up, but seemed reluctant to leave the table. "I'll just make that call, ask Joe there if he knows a garage." He went over and spoke to Joe, nodded, and crossed to a telephone in a corner. Was he really intending to make a call? Would it be a good thing just to walk out and leave him, or would that be too barbarously uncivilized? Donald liked to think of himself as above all a civilized man, and as Joe brought over the sausages and chips, with two cups of tea in thick mugs, he remembered something Golightly had said that jarred on him.

"Do you have an evening paper, by any chance?" Donald asked the café owner.

"Yeah, a driver brought one in. Late edition you want, is it, got the racing results?" Donald said that was what he wanted. Joe waddled across the room, came back with the paper, leaned over the table, and said confidentially, "Had Rolling Home for the second leg of a double. Third at a hundred to eight. Still, you can't beat the bookies all the time, can you? Know what I took off 'em last week? Forty nicker."

"Oh. Congratulations. You said this is the last edition?"

"That's what I said, mate."

He really did not know how to talk to people like Joe. He looked through the paper carefully, then folded it, still

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not knowing quite what to do. Was Golightly—if that was his ridiculous name—telephoning or just standing there pretending to do so? Donald pursed his mouth in thought, stopped himself from whistling, sipped his strong tea. Golightly came over, rubbing his hands and smiling.

"Bangers and chips, I love you." He poured purplish sauce around and over them, began to ply knife and fork, spoke between mouthfuls. "Tried a couple of garages—the second one's going to tow my old bus away and look after it for the night. I'll go on to Folkestone with you, since you were kind enough to offer. I mean, it's going on for eleven now, and I don't want to get stranded."

"What are you going to do, stay at a hotel?"

"Not exactly. I've got a friend there."

"Like your relatives in Littlehampton?"

"No, no." Golightly did not seem to appreciate that this was sarcasm. He closed the eye with the cast in it. "This is a lady friend. A commercial traveler's a bit like a sailor, you know, a girl in every port. As a matter of fact, that's the real reason I want to get to Folkestone tonight, and can you blame me? Why should you single men have all the fun? I suppose you've got a little bit o' fluff waiting for you across the Channel? Or perhaps you're not that way inclined."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. No offense meant and none taken, I hope. Talking too much. I always do. Shan't be a couple of minutes now." There was sweat on Golightly's forehead.

"I'm not taking you," Donald said flatly.

"Not taking me!" The knife and fork clattered on the table. The hand that held the cup shook slightly. Donald felt calm, in complete control of the situation.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'm not going to do anything about it. I've thought it out and I don't want to get involved."

There was a blast of cold air as the door opened to let in two truck drivers in overalls. Golightly looked down at the table and spoke in a low voice. "What d'you mean, involved?"

"I mean you've been telling me a pack of lies. Come along now, admit it." Donald cocked one leg over the other, admired the sheen on his shoes.

"How d' you make that out, old man?"

"I'll tell you, *old man.* You say you're a commercial traveler and you've got an important appointment tomorrow morning. Now, I've met one or two

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commercial travelers, and I've never known one who let himself be parted from his sample case. Natural enough, because without it they've got nothing to show. But you not only leave it in your car—so you say—but you don't even bother to have the garage that's collecting the car drop the bag in here."

"I shan't need the samples tomorrow." Golightly spoke without conviction.

"And then you don't really *sound* like a traveler. All that knight-of-the-road and girl-in-every-port stuff, it's out of date. You sound like an actor, not a very good one, *pretending* to be a commercial traveler. I don't believe you've got a car, let alone a sample case. What's your car number?"

"AKT 113 H"

"Make?"

"Triumph Herald."

"Firm?"

"Universal Woollens."

"Prove it." Donald uncrossed his legs. "Show me your business card."

Slowly Golightly's hand went into his jacket. He kept his eyes on Donald, those slightly crossed eyes, until he had drawn out a wallet. He looked through the contents, wiped his brow with his sleeve, then said, "No business card."

"No card! Why, without a card a commercial traveler doesn't exist."

"All right, I haven't told the exact truth, but I still want to get to Folkestone. I still need a lift."

It was the moment at which Donald had planned to walk out, but something about Golightly's manner made him abruptly change his mind. "Come on then."

His reward was the other man's startled look. "You're taking me?"

"That's what it looks like, doesn't it."

Golightly said nothing more. He paid the bill and they walked to the car in silence, with Donald a couple of steps behind. The ruddiness had drained from Golightly's face, leaving it pale. Donald, as he drove away, said, "There's more to come."

"How do you mean?"

"About you. Who you are, what you've been doing. I want an explanation."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Your shoes. The mud on them. That hasn't come from walking up a lane. More like walking, or maybe running, across fields."

"It was a muddy lane."

Donald took his right hand from the wheel, felt in his jacket pocket, then took it out

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again. "I pick you up near Oastley where that old Mrs. Ford was murdered. You tell me this cock-and-bull story about being a commercial traveler and you talk about murder in a very queer way. How did you know about the murder?"

"Read it in the paper."

"No. I borrowed the last edition in the café and there was nothing in it. How could there be, when it didn't happen till seven o'clock. I heard it on the ten o'clock news, on my car radio. But how about you?"

"Must have heard it the same way. On my car radio."

"That won't wash. I picked you up a couple of minutes after I heard it. And I'll tell you something else. On the radio they didn't say anything about her being killed in the hall."

Silence. The lights showed Ashford ahead, the Folkestone bypass to the left. They took the left turn to the dual highway. Donald thought triumphantly: that's shown him, that's shaken him up, now perhaps I'll get the truth. And sure enough, it was in a tone much less boisterous than usual, in a tone almost meek, that Golightly said, "I made a mistake there, didn't I?"

"You certainly did." Donald began to whistle sweetly, melodiously. And then—he could hardly believe it—Golightly's voice took on a jeering tone.

"You think I was the one who did for her, so why not tell the police then?"

Donald was so shaken that he could not reply.

"All right, I did it. I killed the old girl," Golightly said.

"You—"

"Let's say I did. So why not ring the police from Joe's, when you've got it worked out so nice and logical?"

"I'll tell you why," Donald said. His voice shook with the emotion he had been suppressing. "I hate England—everything about this smug country, the filthy weather, places like that disgusting café, people like you. If I call the police it means I'll have to make a statement give evidence. I shan't be able to leave for—oh, perhaps not for days, weeks. So I don't care, I just don't care what you've done."

"Very decent of you, old man." Still that jeering tone. "We haven't been introduced, have we? I mean, you know my name, you haven't told me yours. But I think I know it."

"What is it?"

"Donald Grant, right?"

With anger that was half assumed and half real Donald said, "You've been looking at my logbook."

"I haven't, you know."

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Somewhere in the far distance there was furious hooting, then it stopped. "I'll tell you a bit of a story, shall I? About an old lady named Mrs. Ford. Quite a nice old lady, but a bit close with her money. No sons, no daughters, so what did it matter, who cared? Nobody, you might think."

Donald pressed his foot on the accelerator. He did not usually drive fast, but it was as if pushing up the needle from 70 to 80 and nearly to 90 helped him to get away from the voice, although of course in fact it didn't; the voice was like a needle digging into his skin.

"One person did care, though. That was her nephew. I expect the sort of thing she said was, 'You'll get everything when I'm gone, dear, now here's a five-pound note to be going on with.' Very annoying to a young man, especially one without much money. He was a sort of free-lance writer, though people don't seem to think he made much of a living at it. Not enough to keep up the nice little pad he shared with his boy friend.

"So one fine evening—a wet evening, as a matter of fact—Mrs. Ford is murdered. Quite a nasty murder—everything turned upside down to try and make it look like a hurried job. Wasn't, though." With a sound like a sigh he added, "I don't have to tell you the name of the nephew."

Donald's mind was empty of thought, except that of the need for action. Golightly went on talking.

"We found out quite a bit about you when we rang your flat, and the young man you share it with—Charles is his name? He said you'd decided to take off quite suddenly on a holiday abroad. Seemed peeved you didn't take him along, too—quite a row you had, according to him. So we've been looking for you. You'd have done better to stay put. Didn't know which road you'd take, so there was poor Golly, Detective Sergeant Golightly as you'll have guessed by this time, getting wet. Could have taken you in for questioning, but I thought you might have a gun. Have you, by the way?"

Behind were the lights of a car, flashing on, off, on again. Donald's fingers moved over the hard curves of the metal in his pocket, and he kept one comforting hand there while he said in a distressed falsetto: "Why shouldn't I go abroad? It's not a crime."

"No, but you made one or two mistakes. Not deliberate ones like mine. You said Mrs. Ford was killed around seven o'clock. So she was, but it

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didn't say so on the radio."

"Your word against mine. I should deny saying it."

"Something else. A witness saw you leave the cottage. Didn't know you, but gave us a description, said he'd know you again."

"One witness. A good counsel would—"

"You were whistling that catchy little tune. Favorite of yours, isn't it? The witness got it loud and clear." Golightly began to sing, loudly, but in tune:

"Carry the man who was born to be King
Over the sea to Skye."

Two things happened together. The car that had been flashing drew level, switched on a spotlight, began blaring away with a hooter. And Golightly, in a quite different voice, loud and angry, cried, "Give me that gun," and threw himself across the steering wheel, pinioning Donald's right arm to his pocket.

Donald just had time to realize that he was not able to control the car with his left hand, and to think about the bad luck that seemed to have dogged his whole life, and then there was nothing . . .

Golightly woke up in a hospital bed. The Superintendent was glaring down at him. "You're a fool, Golly. Only cuts and bruises, but you're lucky to be alive. Grant isn't."

"He bought it?"

"A sliver of glass through the neck when you crashed. You had no need to get into his car, no need at all. Just let us know what road he was on, that's all you had to do."

"Yes, sir. It seemed a good idea at the time."

"And why the hell did you have to leave that café with him?"

"He'd have taken me along anyway, sir. I'd been needling him and I made a slip. He was on to me."

"Don't expect any medals. What was the slip?"

Golightly told him. "He made one, too—mentioned the time she was killed; but of course he'd have denied it. He broke when I told him we had a witness who'd seen him leave the house and heard him whistling that song—you know, song of the Skye boatmen. One of the villagers said he was fond of it."

"We had no witness."

"No, sir. But he didn't know that. And he *was* fond of that song, kept whistling in the car." Virtuously Golightly said, "I don't like whistling. Bad manners, bad habit. Can get you into trouble."

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

As predicted and promised, the Black Widowers have beome a series. To refresh your memory, the first tale of the Black Widowers, "The Acquisitive Chuckle," appeared in our January 1972 issue and introduced the five members of the club: organic chemist James Drake, code expert Thomas Trumbull, writer Emmanuel Rubin, patent attorney Geoffrey Avalon, and artist Mario Gonzalo. (And let's not forget Henry the waiter.) At each monthly meeting the host brings a guest for grilling. In this second story the subject scheduled for cross-examination is Dr. Arnold Stacey, Ph.D. But in this session something different happens. Dr. James Drake, Ph.D., has an academic mystery to put before his colleagues and the guest. . .

THE PHONY PH.D.

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The meeting of the Black Widowers was marred, but only slightly, by the restlessness of James Drake.

It was a shame this had to be so for the dinner was unusually good, even allowing for the loving care with which the "Milano" served its special group every month. And if the veal *cordon bleu* needed anything to add the final bit of luster, it was Henry's meticulous service, which had a plate on the table where no plate had been before, yet without any person present able to catch sight of it en route.

It was Thomas Trumbull's turn to be host, something he did with a savagery to which no one paid the slightest attention—a savagery made particularly bitter by the fact that as host he did not think it fit to come charging in just one second before the preprandial drinks had completed their twice-around (three times for Rubin, who showed no effects).

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Trumbull had exercised the host's privilege and brought a guest for the grilling. The guest was tall, almost as tall as Geoffrey Avalon, the Black Widowers' patent-attorney member. He was lean, almost as lean as Geoffrey Avalon. He was clean-shaven, though, and lacked Avalon's solemnity. Indeed, his face was round and his cheeks were plump, in a manner so out of keeping with the rest of his body that one might have thought him the product of a head transplant. His name was Arnold Stacey.

"Arnold Stacey, Ph.D.," Trumbull had introduced him.

"Ah," said Avalon, with the air of portentousness he automatically gave to his most trivial statement. "Doctor Doctor Stacey."

"Doctor Doctor?" murmured the guest, his lips parting as though getting ready for a smile at the pleasantry sure to follow.

"It is a rule of the Black Widowers," said Trumbull impatiently, "that all members are doctors by virtue of membership. A doctor for any other reason is—"

"—a Doctor Doctor," finished Stacey. And he smiled.

"You can count honorary doctorates, too," said Rubin, his wide-spaced teeth gleaming over a beard as straggly as Avalon's was crisp. "But then I would have to be called Doctor Doctor Doctor—"

Mario Gonzalo was mounting the stairs just then, bringing with him a faint whiff of turpentine as though he had come straight from his artist's studio. (Trumbull maintained you couldn't draw that conclusion, that Gonzalo placed a drop of turpentine behind each ear before every social engagement.)

Gonzalo was in time to catch Emmanuel Rubin's statement and said, before he had quite reached the top step, "What honorary doctorates did you ever receive, Manny? *Dis*honorary doctorates, more likely."

Rubin's face froze, as it usually did when he was attacked without warning; but that was merely the short pause necessary for him to gather his forces. He said, "I can list them for you. In 1938, when I was only fifteen, it so happens I was a revivalist preacher and I received a D.D. from—"

"No, for God's sake," said Trumbull, "don't give us the list. We accept *it all*."

"You're fighting out of your weight, Mario," said Avalon with wooden amiability. "You know Rubin can never be caught in an inconsistency once he starts talking about his early life."

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"Sure," said Gonzalo, "that's why his stories are so dull. They're all autobiographical. No poetry."

"I have written poetry—" began Rubin, and then Drake appeared. Usually he was the first person there; this time he was the last.

"Train late," he said quietly, shucking his coat. Since he had to come from New Jersey to attend, the only surprise was that it didn't happen oftener.

"Introduce me to the guest," Drake added, as he turned to take the drink that Henry the waiter held out for him.

Avalon said, "Doctor Doctor Arnold Stacey—Doctor Doctor James Drake."

"Greetings," said Drake, holding up his glass in salute. "What's the nature of the lesser doctorate, Doctor Stacey."

"Ph.D. in chemistry, Doctor Doctor, and call me Arnold."

Drake's small grizzled mustache seemed to bristle. "Ditto," he said. "My Ph.D. is also in chemistry."

They looked at each other warily for a moment. Then Drake said, "Industry? Government? Academic?"

"I teach. Assistant Professor at Berry University," Stacey replied.

"*Where?*"

"Berry University. It's not a large school. It's in—"

"I know where it is," said Drake. "I did graduate work there—considerably before your time, though. Did you get your degree at Berry before you joined the faculty?"

"No, I—"

"Let's sit down, for God's sake," roared Trumbull. "There's more drinking and less eating going on here all the time." He was standing at the host's seat with his glass raised, glowering at the others as each took his seat. "Sit down, sit down!" And then he intoned the ritual toast to Old King Cole in a singsong baritone while Gonzalo blandly kept time with a hard roll which he broke and buttered when the last syllable was finished.

"What's this?" said Rubin suddenly, staring down at his dish in dismay.

"Pâté de la maison, sir" said Henry softly.

"That's what I thought. Chopped liver. Damn it, Henry, I ask you, as a pathologically honest man, is this fit to eat?"

"The matter is quite subjective, sir. It depends on the personal taste of the diner."

Avalon pounded the table. "Point of order! I object to Manny's use of the adjectival phrase 'pathologically honest.' Violation of confidence!"

Rubin colored slightly. "Hold on, Jeff. I don't violate

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any confidence. That happens to be my opinion of Henry quite independently of what happened here last month."

"Ruling from the chair," said Avalon stubbornly.

Trumbull said, "Shut up, both of you. It is the ruling of the chair that Henry may be recognized by all Black Widowers as that rare phenomenon, a completely honest man. No reason need be given. It can be taken as a matter of common knowledge."

Henry smiled gently. "Shall I take away the pâté, sir? "

"Would *you* eat it, Henry?" asked Rubin.

"With pleasure, sir."

"Then I'll eat it, too." And he did so, with every sign of barely controlled distaste.

Trumbull leaned over to Drake and said in a low voice, "What the hell's bothering you?"

Drake started slightly and said, "Nothing. What's bothering *you?*"

"You are," said Trumbull. "I've never seen a roll taken apart into so many pieces in my life."

The conversation grew general after that, centering chiefly on Rubin's aggrieved contention that honesty lacked survival value and that all the forces of natural selection combined to eliminate honesty as a human trait. He was defending his thesis well until Gonzalo asked him if he attributed his own success as a writer ("such as it is," said Gonzalo) to plagiarism. When Rubin met the point head-on and tried to prove, by close reasoning, that plagiarism was fundamentally different from all other forms of dishonesty and therefore might be treated independently, he was hooted down.

Then, between the main course and dessert, Drake left for the Men's Room and Trumbull followed him.

Trumbull said, "Do you know this Stacey, Jim?"

Drake shook his head. "No. Not at all."

"Well, what's wrong, then? I admit you're not an animated phonograph needle like Rubin but damn it, you haven't said a word all dinner! And you keep watching Stacey."

Drake said, "Do me a favor, Tom. Let me question him after dinner."

Trumbull shrugged. "Sure."

Over the coffee Trumbull said, "The time has come for the grilling of the guest. Under ordinary circumstances I, as the possessor of the only logical mind at the table, would begin. On this occasion, however, I pass in favor of Doctor Doctor Drake since he is of the same

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professional persuasion as our honored guest."

"Doctor Doctor Stacey," began Drake abruptly, "how do you justify your existence?"

"Less and less as time goes on," said Stacey, unperturbed.

"What the hell does that mean?" broke in Trumbull.

"*I'm* asking the questions," said Drake with unaccustomed firmness.

"I don't mind answering," said Stacey. "Since the universities seem to be in deeper trouble each year, and as I do nothing about it, my own function as a university appendage seems continually less defensible."

Drake ignored that. He said, "You teach at the school where I earned my master's degree. Have you ever heard of me?"

Stacey hesitated. "I'm sorry, Jim. There are a lot of chemists I haven't heard of. No offense intended."

"I'm not sensitive. I never heard of you, either. What I mean is: have you ever heard of me at Berry U.? As a student there?"

"No, I haven't."

"I'm not surprised. But there was another student at Berry when I was there who stayed on for his doctorate. His name was Faron—F-A-R-O-N. Lance Faron. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Lance Faron?" Stacey frowned.

"Lance may have been short for Lancelot—Lancelot Faron. But we always called him Lance."

Stacey shook his head. "No, the name isn't familiar."

Drake said, "But you have heard of David St. George?"

"Professor St. George? Certainly. He died the same year I joined the faculty. I can't say I knew him, but I've certainly heard of him."

Trumbull said, "Hell and damnation, Jim. What kind of questions are these? Is this old-grad week?"

Drake, who had drifted off into thought, scrambled out of it. "Wait, Tom. I'm getting at something, and I don't want to ask further questions. I want to tell a story first. My God, this has been bothering me for years and I never thought of putting it up to all of you till now—now that our guest—"

"I vote for the story," interrupted Gonzalo.

"On condition," said Avalon, "it not be construed as setting a precedent."

"Chair decides precedents," growled Trumbull. "Go ahead, Drake. Only for God's sake don't take all night."

"It's simple enough," said Drake, "and it's about Lance Faron, which is his real name;

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and since I'm going to slander him, you'll have to understand, Arnold, that everything said within these walls is strictly confidential."

"That's been explained to me," said Stacey.

"Go on," shouted Trumbull. "You *will* take all night."

Drake said, "The thing about Lance is that I don't think he ever intended to be a chemist. His family was rich—well, I'll tell you. When he was doing graduate work he had his lab outfitted with a cork floor at his own expense."

"Why a cork floor?" Gonzalo demanded.

"If you'd ever dropped a beaker on a tile floor you wouldn't have to ask," said Drake. "Lance majored in chemistry as an undergraduate because he had to major in something. Then he went on to do graduate work in the same field because World War II was on in Europe, the draft was beginning—it was 1940—and graduate work in chemistry would look good to the draft board. And it did; he never got into the army as far as I know. But that was perfectly legitimate; I never got into uniform, either, so I point no fingers."

Avalon, who had been a naval officer, looked austere but agreed. "Perfectly legitimate."

Drake said, "He wasn't serious about it—about chemistry, I mean. He had no natural aptitude for it and he never really worked at it. He was satisfied to get straight C's. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose, and it was good enough to sweat out a master's degree for him—which doesn't amount to much in chemistry. But the grades weren't high enough to qualify him for research toward a doctorate.

"That was the whole point. We all—the rest of us who were in graduate chemistry that year—assumed he would only go as far as his master's. Then he'd get some sort of job that would keep his draft exemption going; we figured his father would help out there—"

"Were the rest of you jealous of him?" asked Rubin. "Because that kind of guy—"

"We weren't jealous of *him*," said Drake. "Sure, we envied his *situation*. Hell, those were the days before government grants fell about us like snowflakes. Every college semester I lived a suspense story called Can-I-Dig-Up-the-Tuition-or-Do-I-Have-to-Drop-Out? All of us would have liked to be rich, or have a rich father. But Lance was a likable guy. He didn't parade his advantages and would even lend us a few bucks when we were in a hole and he'd do it

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unostentatiously. And he was perfectly willing to concede he was no brain.

"In return we were willing to help him. Gus Blue tutored him in physical organic—for a fee. And I must admit Lance wasn't always scrupulous. There was one preparation he was supposed to have synthesized in lab and we all knew he bought a sample at a chemical supply house and turned it in as his own. At least, we were pretty sure he did, but it didn't bother us."

Rubin said, "Why not? That was dishonest, wasn't it?"

"Because it didn't do him any good," said Drake, in annoyance. "It just meant another C. But the reason I bring it up is that we all knew he was not only capable of cheating but actually did cheat."

"You mean the rest of you wouldn't have?" interposed Stacey. There was a touch of cynicism in his voice.

Drake lifted his eyebrows. "I wouldn't guarantee any of us if we had really been pushed. The point is, we weren't. We all had a fighting chance to get through without the risk of cheating, so none of us did. Certainly, I didn't.

"But then there came a time when Lance made up his mind to go on for his Ph.D. It was at a smoker. The war jobs were just beginning to open up and there were a few recruiters on campus. It meant complete security from the draft, but getting our Ph.D.'s meant a lot to us and there was always some question as to whether we'd come back to school once we got away from class for any reason.

"Someone—not I—said he wished he were in Lance's shoes. Lance had no choice to make. We were sure he would take a job.

" 'I don't know,' Lance said, maybe just to be contrary. 'I think I'll stay right here and go on for the Ph.D.'

"He may have been joking. Anyway, we all thought he was, and we laughed. But we were all a little high at the smoker and it became one of those laughs without reason, you know? If one of us started to die down, he would catch someone else's eyes and start off again. Really it wasn't that funny. In fact, it wasn't funny at all. But we laughed till we were half suffocated. And Lance turned red, and then white.

"I remember I tried to say, 'Lance, we're not laughing at *you*.' But I just couldn't. I was choking and sputtering. So Lance walked out on us.

"After that he did go on for his Ph.D. He wouldn't talk

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about it but he signed all the necessary forms and that seemed to satisfy him. After a while the situation became as before. He was friendly again.

"I said to him, 'Listen, Lance, you'll be disappointed. You can't get faculty approval for doctoral research with a straight-C record. You just can't.'

"He said, 'Why not? I've talked to the committee. I told them I'd take chemical kinetics under Professor St. George, and that I'd do better than C in that. I said I'd show them what I could do.'

"That made less than no sense to me. That was much funnier than the remark we had all laughed at. You'd have to know St. George. You ought to know what I mean, Arnold."

Stacey nodded. "He gave a stiff course in kinetics. One or two of the brightest would make a B; otherwise, all C's and F's."

Drake nodded. "There are some professors who take pride in that sort of thing. It's a kind of professorial version of Captain Bligh. But St. George was a good chemist, probably the best Berry ever had. He was the only member of the faculty to achieve national prominence after the war. If Lance could take his course and get a high mark, that was bound to be impressive. Even with C's in everything else, the argument would be: 'Well, he hasn't worked much because he hasn't had to, but when he finally decided to buckle down he showed fire-cracking ability.'

"He and I took chemical kinetics together and I was running and sweating every day of that course. But Lance sat in the seat next to me and never stopped smiling. He took notes casually, and sometimes he even studied them.

"Well, it went down to the wire like that. St. George didn't give quizzes. He let everything hang on the discussion periods and on the final examination, which lasted three hours—a *full* three hours.

"In the final week of the course there were no lectures and the students had their last chance to pull themselves together before exams week. Lance was still smiling. His work in the other courses had been usual Lance-quality, but that didn't seem to bother him. We would say, 'How are you doing in kinetics, Lance?' and he would say, 'No sweat,' and sound *cheerful*, damn it.

"Then came the day of the final exam—" Drake paused, and his lips tightened.

"Well?" said Trumbull.

Drake said, his voice a little lower, "Lance Faron passed. He

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did more than pass. He got a 96. No one had *ever* gotten over 90 in one of St. George's finals and I doubt anyone ever has since."

"I never heard of anyone getting in the 90's in recent times," said Stacey.

"What did you get?" asked Gonzalo.

"I got 82," said Drake. "And except for Lance's mark it was the best in the class."

"What happened to the fellow?" asked Avalon.

"He went on for his Ph.D., of course. The faculty qualified him without hesitation and the story was that St. George himself went to bat for him.

"I left after that," Drake continued. "I worked on isotope separation during the war and eventually shifted to Wisconsin for my doctoral research. But I would hear about Lance sometimes from old friends. The last I heard he was in Maryland somewhere, running a private lab of his own. About ten years ago I remember looking up his name in Chemical Abstracts and finding the record of a few papers he had turned out. Run-of-the-mill stuff. Typical Lance."

"He's still independently wealthy?" asked Trumbull.

"I suppose so."

Trumbull leaned back. "If that's your story, Jim, then what the hell is biting you?"

Drake looked about the table, first at one and then at another. Then he brought his fist down so that the coffee cups jumped and clattered. "Because he *cheated*, damn his hide! And as long as he got his Ph.D. by fraud, mine is cheapened by that much—and yours, too," he said to Stacey.

Stacey murmured, "Phony doctor."

"What?" said Drake.

"Nothing," said Stacey, "I was just thinking of a colleague of mine who did a stint at a medical school where the students regarded the M.D. as the only legitimate doctor's degree in the universe. To them a Ph.D. stood for 'phony doctor.' "

Drake snorted.

"Actually," began Rubin argumentatively, "if you—"

Avalon cut in from his impressive height. "Well, see here, Jim, if he cheated, how did he get his Ph.D.?"

"Because there was never anything to *prove* he cheated."

"Did it ever occur to you," said Gonzalo, "that maybe he didn't cheat? Maybe it was really true that when he buckled down he had—what did you call it?—fire-cracking ability."

"No," said Drake, with

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another coffee-cup-rattling fist on the table. "That's impossible. He never showed that kind of ability before and he never showed it afterward. Besides, he had that *confidence* all through the course. He had the confidence that could only mean he had worked out a foolproof plan to get his A."

Trumbull said, shrugging, "All right, say he did. He got his Ph.D. but he didn't do so well later on. From what you say he's just off in a corner somewhere, poking along. You know damn well, Jim, that lots of guys achieve high professional rank, even without cheating, who have all their brains in their elbows. So what? Why get mad at one particular guy who got away with it? You know why I think you're off your rocker on the subject, Jim? What gripes you is that you don't know *how* he did it. If you could figure it out you'd forget the whole thing."

Henry the waiter interrupted, "More brandy, gentlemen?"

Five delicate little glasses were raised. Avalon, who measured out his allowance with an eye dropper, kept his glass down.

Drake said, "Well, then, Tom, you tell me. How *did* he do it? You're the code expert."

"But there's no code involved. I don't know. Maybe he—he—managed to get someone else to take the test for him or handed in someone else's paper."

"In someone else's handwriting?" said Drake scornfully. "Besides, I thought of that. We all thought of it. You don't suppose I was the only one who knew Lance cheated, do you? We all knew it. When that 96 went up on the bulletin board, after we got our breath back—and that took a while—we demanded to see his paper. He handed it over with no objections and we all went over it. It was a near-perfect job, but it was unquestionably in his handwriting and contained his turns of phrase. I wasn't even impressed by the few errors he made. They were the sort he might have thrown in deliberately in order not to have a perfect paper."

"All right," said Gonzalo, "someone else somehow did the test for him and your friend copied it over in his own words and handwriting."

"Impossible. There was no one in the class but the students and St. George's assistant. The assistant opened the sealed test papers just before the test started. No one could have written one paper for Lance and another for himself, even if you could imagine it not having

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been observed. Besides, there wasn't anyone in the class capable of turning out a 96-level paper."

Avalon said, "If you were doing it right there, it would have been impossible. But suppose Lance managed to get a copy of the questions well before the test and then swatted away at the textbooks till he had worked out perfect answers? Couldn't he have done that somehow?"

"No, he couldn't," said Drake flatly. "You're not suggesting anything we didn't think of then, take my word for it. The university had had a cheating scandal some years before and the whole test procedure had been tightened up. St. George followed this new procedure. He made up the questions and turned them in to his secretary the day before the test. She mimeographed the necessary number of copies in St. George's presence. He proofread them, then destroyed the originals, both his and the original mineograph. The question papers were packaged and sealed and placed in the school safe. The safe was opened just before the test and handed to St. George's assistant. There was no way of Lance seeing the questions."

"Maybe not just then," said Avalon. "But even if St. George had the questions mimeographed the day before the test, how long might he have had the questions in his possession? Or he might have used a set of questions used on a previous—"

"No," interrupted Drake. "We carefully studied all previous tests prepared by St. George. Do you think we were fools? There was no duplication of questions."

"All right. But even if he prepared an entirely new test, he might have prepared it at the beginning of the semester. Lance might somehow have seen the questions early in the semester. It would be a lot easier to work out answers to a fixed number of questions during the course of the semester than to try to learn the entire subject matter."

"I think you've got something there, Jeff," said Gonzalo.

"He's got nothing there," snapped Drake, "because that's not the way St. George worked it. Every question in the final exam that semester turned on some particular point that some particular student goofed up on in class. One of them, and the most subtle, covered a point that I had missed in the very last week of lectures. I pointed out what I thought was a mistake in a derivation, and St. George—well, never mind. The point is, the test had to be

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prepared *after* the last lecture."

Arnold Stacey broke in. "Did St. George *always* do that? If he did, he would have been telegraphing a hell of a lot to the kids."

"You mean the students would have been expecting only questions on errors that had been made in the discussion periods."

"More than that. The students could have deliberately pulled boners on those parts of the subject they actually knew in order to lure St. George into placing twenty-points'-worth on each phony boner."

Drake said, "I can't answer that. We weren't in his previous classes, so we didn't know if his previous tests followed the same pattern."

"Previous classes would have passed on the news, wouldn't they? At least, if classes in the forties were anything like classes now."

"They sure would have," Drake grinned, "and they didn't."

"Say, Jim," said Gonzalo, "how did Lance do in the discussion periods?"

"He kept quiet, played it safe. We all took it for granted he'd do that, so we weren't surprised."

Gonzalo said, "What about the department secretary? Couldn't Lance have wheedled her into telling him the questions? Or even have bribed her?"

Drake said grimly, "You don't know the secretary. Besides, he couldn't have. Nor could he have broken into the safe. From the nature of the questions, we could tell the exam had been made up in the last week before the exam was given, and during that last week he couldn't have done a thing."

"Are you sure?" asked Trumbull.

"You bet. It bugged us all that he was so damned confident. The rest of us were sea-green with the fear of flunking and he just kept *smiling*. On the day of the last lecture someone said, 'He's going to steal the question sheet.' Actually, *I* said it, but the others agreed and we decided to—to— Well, we kept an eye on him."

"You mean you never let him out of your sight?" demanded Avalon. "Did you watch at night in shifts? Did you follow him into the john?"

"Damn near. He was Burroughs' roommate and Burroughs was a light sleeper and swore he knew every time Lance turned over."

"Burroughs might have been drugged one night," said Rubin.

"He might have, but he didn't think so, and no one else

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thought so. Lance just didn't act suspicious in any way; he didn't even act annoyed at being watched."

"Did he know he was being watched?" said Rubin.

"He probably did. Every time he went somewhere he would grin and say, 'Who's coming along?' "

"Where did he go?"

"Just the normal places. He ate, drank, slept. He went to the school library or sat in his room. He went to the post office, the bank, places like that. We followed him up and down all of Berry's streets and roads. Besides—"

"Besides, what?" asked Trumbull.

"Besides, even if he could have gotten hold of the question paper, it could only have been in those few days before the test, maybe only the night before. He would have had to swat out the answers, being Lance. It would have taken him days and days of solid work over the books. If he could have answered them by just taking a look at them, he wouldn't have had to cheat; and he did practically no studying in that last week."

Rubin said sardonically, "It seems to me, Jim, you've painted yourself into a corner. Your man couldn't possibly have cheated."

"That's the whole point," cried Drake. "He *must* have cheated and he did it so cleverly that no one caught him. No one could even figure out how he did it. Tom's right. *That's* what gripes me."

And then Henry the waiter coughed. "If I may offer a suggestion, gentlemen?"

"Yes, Henry," said Trumbull.

"It seems to me, gentlemen, that you are too much at home with petty dishonesty to understand it very well."

"Why, Henry, you hurt me cruelly," said Avalon, with a smile, but his dark eyebrows curled down over his eyes.

"I mean no disrespect, gentlemen, but Mr. Rubin maintained that dishonesty has value. Mr. Trumbull thinks that Doctor Drake is annoyed only because the cheating was clever enough to escape detection, not because it existed, and perhaps all of you agree with that."

Gonzalo said, "I think you're hinting, Henry, that you're so honest that you're more sensitive to dishonesty than we are and therefore can understand it better."

Henry said, "I would almost think so, sir, in view of the fact that not one of you has commented on the one glaring improbability in Doctor Drake's story that seems to me to

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explain everything."

"What's that?" asked Drake.

"Why, Professor St. George's attitude, sir. Here is a professor who takes pride in flunking many of his students, who never has anyone get above the 80's on the final examination. And then a student who is known to be thoroughly mediocre—and I gather that everyone in the department, both faculty and students, knew of that mediocrity—gets a 96 and the professor accepts that and even backs him before the qualifying committee. Surely he would have been the first one to suspect dishonesty. And most indignantly, too."

Drake said, "Maybe he couldn't bring himself to admit that he could be cheated on."

Henry said, "You keep finding excuses, sir. In any situation in which a professor asks questions and a student answers them, one always feels that if there is dishonesty, it is always the *student's* dishonesty. Why? What if it were the *professor* who was dishonest?"

Drake said, "What would he get out of that?"

"What does one usually get? Money, I suspect, sir. The situation as you described it is that of a student who was very well off financially and a professor who had the kind of salary a professor used to get in those days before government grants. Suppose the student had offered a few thousand dollars—"

"For what? To hand in a fake mark? We saw Lance's answer paper and it was absolutely legitimate. To let Lance see the questions before having them mimeographed? It wouldn't have done Lance any good—he wouldn't have had the time to memorize the answers."

"Look at it in reverse, sir. Suppose the student offered a few thousand dollars to let him, the student, give the professor the questions."

"Suppose, sir," Henry went on patiently, "that it was Mr. Lance Faron who made up the questions, one by one, in the course of the semester. He picked on interesting errors that came up in class, never talking during the discussions so that he could listen more closely. He polished the questions as the semester proceeded. As Mr. Avalon said, it is easier to get a few specific points straight than to learn the entire subject matter. Then he deliberately and cleverly included one question from the last week's lectures, making you all sure the test had been entirely created in that last week. It also meant he turned out a test quite different from St. George's usual tests. Previous

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tests in the course had not turned on students' errors. Nor did later ones, if I may judge from Doctor Stacey's surprise. Then at the end of the course, with the test paper completed, he simply mailed it to the professor."

"Mailed it?" said Gonzalo.

"Doctor Drake said the young man visited the post office. So he could have mailed it. Professor St. George would have received the questions with, perhaps, part of the payment in small bills. He would then have written it over in his own handwriting, or typing, and passed it on to his secretary. From then on all would be normal. And of course the professor would have had to back the student thereafter all the way."

"Why not?" said Gonzalo enthusiastically. "It makes sense!"

Drake said slowly, "I've got to admit that's a possibility that never occurred to any of us. But, of course, we'll never know."

Stacey broke in loudly. "I've hardly said a word all evening, though I was told I'd be grilled."

"Sorry about that," said Trumbull. "This meathead, Drake, had a story to tell because you came from Berry."

"Well, then, because I come from Berry, let me add something to the story. Professor St. George died the year I came to Berry, as I said, and I didn't really know him.. But I know many people who did know him and I've heard many things about him."

"You mean he was known to be dishonest?" asked Drake.

"No one said that. But he was known to be unscrupulous and I've heard some unsavory hints about how he maneuvered government grants into yielding him a personal income. When I heard your story about Lance, Jim, I must admit I didn't think St. George would be involved in quite that way. But now that Henry has taken the trouble to think the unthinkable from the mountain height of his own honesty—why, I believe he's right."

Trumbull said, "Then that's that. Jim, after thirty years, you can forget the whole thing."

"Except—except—" A half smile came over Drake's face and then he broke into a laugh. "I *am* dishonest because I can't help thinking that if Lance had the questions all along, the creep might have passed on a hint or two to the rest of us."

"After you had all laughed at him, sir?" asked Henry quietly, and he began to clear the table.

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a *NEW* crime story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Here is Florence V. Mayberry, again doing her particular thing. But this time she gives it something new, something different—what might be called "a piecemeal technique." Piecemeal in more ways than one . . . Is the tiny community of Sea Mount a microcosmic mirror of the world? (Aren't we all?)

THE THING ON THE BEACH

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Mrs. Cecilia Pigazzi's black button eyes twinkled with pleasure when she hopped out of bed, pulled up the blinds of her window, and saw bright sunshine. No fog this morning! Oh, lolly-da, a good day to watch what went on in Sea Mount. Must hurry. Else she might be in her nightgown when Angelo the fish man drove round in his truck and all the neighbors would be at their windows spying on everything a widow did.

She hurried into the bathroom, splashed her face, rinsed her mouth, and carefully slipped in her dentures, moving her lower jaw back and forth to adjust them. Tony used to laugh at her, started calling her an old woman when she was only 30 and her teeth went bad. Ah well, poor old Tony, God rest his soul!

Racing against the sound of Angelo's fish-truck horn, she pulled a pair of stretch bluejeans over her lush round bottom, zipped them, and slipped her arms into a plaid flannel shirt. The shirt had belonged to Tony, her husband, a large man whose demise before he reached 50 was surely encouraged by gargantuan helpings of ravioli, spaghetti, chili, deviled crab, chili and more chili; he had been crazy for spicy foods, that man.

Hastily she measured the coffee and plugged in the percolator. Then, her lips

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swelling and fluttering almost as in passion, she went to the bay window of her living room where, in the place of honor, stood her beloved spyglass. A beautiful instrument, it had been auctioned off by an old sea captain's estate. Cost her a pretty penny, too, with every family in Sea Mount wild to get their hands on it. But a treasure. Not another telescope in the valley to match it. Now, with a sigh of satisfaction, she put her eye to its sight and swung it in slow reconnoiter over the valley.

Ah, ha! That nasty little boy of Joe and Marnie Sykes was teasing their German Shepherd again; one of these days that dog would pull his chain free and then young smarty, Little Joe, might be sorry. Oh, good, good! Big Joe, his dad, appeared on the back steps and motioned the boy into the house. But the ornery little whelp just ran down the hill and headed for the beach, no doubt to fool around and maybe drown himself. Saturday. No school to keep him in line. Oh, well—

What, no smoke rising from Silas Williams' chimney? Had old tightwad Silas at last broke loose with some money and bought his prissy-mouthed Laura an up-to-date range that used gas instead of driftwood? Or maybe taken her up to San Francisco? Ha, ha, maybe to a lawyer to make her sign away all rights to his money so that one of these days she wouldn't be aggravated into finishing him off. Well, keep looking, dear, Sea Mount's got more in it than the Williams place.

Ringing the tiny community on three sides were low mountains, still green from winter and early spring rains. On the remaining side was the Pacific Ocean, blue and undefiled. Between the scattered houses and the mountains were dark fields of rich earth that produced artichokes, peas, and flowers for San Francisco's markets.

The sight of the valley gave Cecilia a surge of satisfied possession. Yes, yes, it was a pretty place. Nice and quiet. A place for real down-to-earth folks.

She spotted Hughie Cornfeld carrying a bucket and slowly walking toward the cliff trail which led from his one-room shack at the cliff's top down to the pale sandy beach. "Going clam digging," she decided, her mouth watering in anticipation. Hughie was different from Angelo. Angelo charged money for his fish. Hughie, on the other hand, despised money and was generous with the food he garnered from the sea.

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Hughie, that screwball, admitted he used to be head of some brokerage company in San Francisco. A really big company, according to rumors that were whispered around, with Hughie himself a millionaire. Imagine! Old holes-in-the-pants Hughie! Once, when she broached the subject to him, he told her he walked out of the whole dog-eat-dog mess because it was killing his soul.

"I gave all my money to my wife Sadie," he had said. "Sadie loved money. So did I. Once. But finally I hated it and what it did to me. So Sadie got her money, and I got fresh air and freedom."

Holes in his head as well as in his pants, that was Cecilia's personal opinion. Not that she was wild about money herself, but thank God Tony left enough insurance to keep a roof over her head and her stomach filled. That ought to please Tony, who was always saying food, bed, roof over one's head, in that order. "So, Tony, I got it all, even the other half of the bed I'm in no hurry to fill up," she said to his memory.

The inner picture of Tony Pigazzi clung as she returned to her cheerful kitchen with its red and white checked wallpaper and white woodwork. She could almost see him stomp across the waxed linoleum, heavy belly hanging over pants that were fastened only at the top button, hawking and belching as he made his way to the bathroom. "Ah, well, old Tony," she said cheerfully. Like a good placid pet patted on the head, the memory curled up in the back of her mind and went to sleep.

As soon as she finished her hearty breakfast she hurried back for another look through the spyglass. Down by the cliff she caught a flash of blue moving rapidly toward the highway. Must be Little Joe Sykes, he was wearing a bright blue shirt this morning. Running like crazy, he was. Maybe Hughie lost his good nature and chased the brat off the beach for interfering with his clam digging.

Sure enough, here came Hughie after him. Running good for a man of 50 or so, his shaggy hair bouncing in the breeze he made.

Well, now, look at that! Here comes that Sykes dog after them, beating its chain behind him, finally broke loose and a danger to everybody.

The boy, the man, and the dog ran down the brief stretch of highway, past the garage, to Ed and Anna Grimes's general store. The boy flung open the door. Hughie followed. The dog ran back and forth outside,

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panting and looking nervously at his dragging chain.

It seemed only an instant until Ed Grimes, Hughie, and the boy tore out of the store, Anna Grimes behind them, all talking excitedly. "Pity this thing can't hear!" Cecilia fumed.

The dog ran at the boy, his tongue slapping affectionately over him. The boy swatted the dog, mouthed something. The dog fell to its stomach and started creeping toward the hill. "Ought to have bitten him," she muttered. "I can't stand people who hurt animals."

Anna stayed behind while the men and boy half ran, half walked toward Hughie's shack and disappeared over the cliff's edge.

Cecilia flung on a sweater, pulled out the percolator plug, rushed out the back door. She got in the big old station wagon Tony had left her and headed down the village lane toward the highway. She barely reached it ahead of Big Joe Sykes, the wheels of his car screaming right behind her. Of course. With Marnie Sykes glued to her binoculars at her front window every free minute of the day. Saw their boy maybe got himself into some devilment.

Farther up the hill two more cars barreled toward them, looked like Angelo's fish truck and Joe Watanabi's car.

She left her car and hurried along the cliff's edge. Below her, the men and boy, with the dog skulking behind, ran along the tide-packed sand. They stopped, veered to a spot high on the beach, bent down. The dog, now close, darted at something. The boy slapped him back. Whatever they were looking at, they didn't touch it.

Cecilia scrambled down the rough footholds worn into the steep path. As she reached the men Ed Grimes put out his foot and gingerly pushed at something. Hughie shook his head and turned his face. The boy was white under his tan and saliva moistened his lips. They all turned and looked at Cecilia, their eyes unfocused as though they had tuned out everything but what lay at their feet. As a group, Cecilia now part of it, they looked down again. Cecilia gasped and whispered, "Whose is it?"

Hughie shrugged, threw out his hands in a gesture of helplessness. Ed moved a chaw of tobacco from his cheek and began to chew.

"Could be anybody's." It was Big Joe Sykes speaking, now pushed in beside them, with Angelo big-eyed and quiet behind him.

Little Joe looked up at his

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father and stepped back. The paleness of his face had sickened into a greenish cast and he swallowed. "I wasn't doing nothing," he whined. "Just going along with Hughie. Then I got ahead and was fooling around by the cliff. And there it was. Like a funny stick, all covered with sand. So I picked it up." He swallowed hard. "Then I could tell. What it was."

"Can't be just anybody's," Ed Grimes finally said. "Anyway, not a man's."

Hughie shook his head sorrowfully. His blue eyes tilted downward and his shoulders rocked slightly. All he needs is a shawl and a wall to beat his head against, Cecilia thought; the man's a weakling.

"Yeah, must be a woman's foot all right, by the size of it," Big Joe agreed. "Rest of her is probably in the ocean, eat up by this time."

Cecilia's stomach churned, but she fought down the sickness. Now, let's see, what woman around Sea Mount has trouble? Which of us could that foot belong to?

"Maybe gangsters did it!" Little Joe put in. "I seen a show like that on TV. Maybe we ought to call the F.B.I. or get Chief Ironside—gee, Dad—"

"Damn it, Little Joe, get out of here!"

"Aw, Dad, I'm the one that found it. Right over there." He pointed toward the cliff.

"Get! And take King with you. Beat it, boy!"

Reluctantly the boy picked up the loose chain and slowly headed for the cliff path.

"What woman around here have we lost sight of?" Cecilia asked.

Ed spat, frowned. "Lost sight of 'em all, as far as I'm concerned, the way everybody around here keeps to themselves. Sea Mount women don't trade in my store. They gotta waste gas driving to Half Moon trying to save a coupla pennies." He grinned sourly at Cecilia. "Ain't seen you for a bit, Cecilia." He made a point of looking at her feet. "Nope, you got both this morning."

"This is no joking matter, Ed Grimes," Cecilia said stiffly. "Now listen, we've got to get the authorities. Joe, you go for the Sheriff—no, Ed, you better go back to the store and call the Sheriff, get a deputy out here. Hughie and Angelo, you stay here, see that the waves don't—well, wash it away. While I look around." She hesitated delicately. "You never know, there might be more."

"I often wondered why a big strong guy like Tony decided to die," Big Joe said. "Now I know. Mrs. Lordalmighty, I'm

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gonna tell my wife and nobody else. And she's not going to touch our telephone, either. I don't want my kid mixed up in any part of this. Tell 'em the dog found it."

Ed put a contemplative gaze on Cecilia. "You got plenty breath. Why waste ours?" He turned and swung his long loose-hinged legs over the sand toward the cliff. Big Joe followed. After a moment so did Angelo, calling back, "I don't see nothing. You tell 'em that. I got fish to sell."

At the cliff top the three men grouped briefly around Mr. Watanabi, the flower grower who lived deep in the valley. They pointed to the beach. Then the four headed toward the highway.

"Cecilia, I apologize for them," Hughie said gently. "They haven't got any respect and courtesy—it's a terrible thing not to have respect. No doubt they had bad training when they were children. Besides, like Ed said, people in Sea Mount keep to themselves. They don't get used to talking to each other."

"One of 'em knows something," she said spitefully. "Or can make a guess about it. Maybe they know what woman has suddenly left town, isn't seen around her yard or—" Her voice trailed off. No smoke in Silas Williams' house? Could Silas have—did *this* belong to Laura Williams?

"Hughie, how old would you judge this woman to be?"

Hughie's arms lifted helplessly. "Who can tell? Sea water. Sand scrubbing the skin."

"Laboratories can. They've got tests and things. Hughie, you wait here and watch. *I'll* go telephone. I've got nothing to hide. Like maybe Big Joe and Ed have."

"Cissie, don't say that, Big Joe and Ed—"

She whirled on him, her face red and furious. "Don't call me that, Hughie Cornfeld! Don't you *ever* call me that! Nobody gave you the right—nobody ever had the right! Tony was always doing that, he knew it made me mad, so don't *you* start! Not even Tony had the right."

"Please, Cecilia, please, dear Mrs. Pigazzi." Hughie's hand gently touched her shoulder. She flung it off. "It slipped out—no meaning to it. I have the highest respect. It's like everybody calls me Hughie. I don't mind when they're nice and friendly with it." He tried to laugh. "I was finished with Mr. Hugh David Cornfeld a long time ago. I like Hughie. Dear Mrs. Pigazzi, please, you run along now, take care of things, and I'll watch."

Mollified, she pouted her

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lips, then lifted them in a one-sided smile. "Well. Okay. But it bugs me to be called that. Kids did it when I was little, all my seven brothers and sisters, I was the youngest. Only they really meant *sissy*. Turned me into a fighter. I jabbed my table fork into my oldest brother's hand once when he called me that. Okay, Hughie, keep an eye out."

Cecilia panted up the path and hurried to the public telephone booth outside the Grimes General Store and Garage. As she entered, Ed Grimes stuck his head out the door of his store and yelled, "I done it!" Then he vanished behind the slammed door.

"Damned old fool!" Cecilia said loudly. She walked slowly back to the lot beside Hughie's shack, climbed into her station wagon, and waited for the officers to arrive.

When she saw a Sheriff's car approaching she hastily left the station wagon and hightailed it down the cliff path. Hughie was far down the beach, bending down, digging in the sand, poking his hand into his bucket of sea water. Blast the man, he couldn't wait to dig those clams! Her gaze scoured the sand, searching for that small and terrible object. It wasn't to be seen. "Hughie!" she screamed.

"It's gone, he's lost it!" she said frantically to the Sheriff's men, now close behind her. "He's let the ocean get it!"

Her agile mind pounced on a new thought—maybe Hughie? For all his soft and gentle ways, maybe Hughie? Maybe Hughie, living like a bachelor even though he was married, or used to be, got carried away; men were crazy anyway.

Then she saw it. Lone and pitiful, disguised by rubbings of sand. Its humanness had vanished; it was now a mere object, displayed as though the beach were a macabre museum. She pointed to it. "No, it's still here. There."

But as she told Hughie later, should a busy woman have put aside her housework and hung around for this? A couple of men strutting around in uniforms and saying, "Hum-m-m, did you discover any more of the body, Mr. Cornfeld? Oh, the boy found it, where's the boy? That your house up there? You see any strangers around? Hear any cars drive up in the night? Hum-m-m." Then after walking around in circles on the sand, like dogs looking for a soft spot to take a nap: "Well, we'll get it checked in the lab—age, how long dead, so on. But unless more of the body is found—well, we don't keep toeprints on file."

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"I could do better myself, and me with no salary like they get," she told Hughie when they left.

"I don't doubt it," Hughie agreed. His large sad eyes surveyed her, from her thick wavy hair, round face with its full lips, down over her sturdy body. "You're a very vigorous lady."

"I'm not bragging, it's just plain truth," she said, bridling pleasurably at his inspection. "They need a good woman in that Sheriff's office. Hughie, I think I'll run along now, I've got work to do."

"And I can get my clams," Hughie said patiently.

Cecilia sat for a few minutes in her station wagon before starting the engine, cogitating on how to manage a casual visit to Silas Williams' house. To be casual was difficult, seeing she had been there only once in the twelve years she had lived in Sea Mount. That other time to ask for a rosebush slip, the frosty-faced Laura giving it to her and then saying after barely a minute of chat, "Good day, Mrs. Pigazzi."

The station wagon jerked forward, slowly drove to the Williams house, and parked.

Still no chimney smoke. No fire in the cook stove. "Eggs," said Cecilia, and nodded her head approvingly at her shrewdness. "They've got hens. If they're home I'll tell 'em I've run out of eggs and can't stand the store-bought ones."

She went to the rear of the house to be less visible to the scattered houses on the slope. She tapped on the back door, primly straightened her sweater, and squinted through the glass in the door. Involuntarily she jumped back. Silas and Laura Williams were sitting at the kitchen table, not a speck of food on it, no dishes, nothing. They were just sitting, turning their heads and staring at her.

Laura got up and opened the door. Cecilia sucked in her breath and took another step back. A long lethally sharp butcher knife was in Laura's hand. "Yes, Mrs. Pigazzi?"

"I—I wondered if you had any spare eggs you'd sell. I ran out and you know those eggs at the store, they break the minute they hit the pan."

"No, Mrs. Pigazzi," Laura said flatly, evenly. "This morning I cracked all our eggs and ran them down the sink. You may tell everyone in Sea Mount and clear to Half Moon Bay that I shall continue to do this, and worse, until Mr. Williams buys me a gas range. You may also tell them that Mr. Williams and I are both on a hunger strike. And unless he becomes reasonable they are likely to

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find us dead here soon. At the table, starved to death, with a stocked cupboard and seventy-five thousand dollars in the bank."

"Laura! Shut your mouth!" Silas roared. "You know that woman. She'll blast it everywhere."

"You may tell everyone," Laura repeated. "Add to it that I am going to gouge Mr. Williams with this butcher knife if he tries to build a fire in that damn wood stove."

Silas groaned, half rose from his chair. Laura wheeled at the movement, the butcher knife ready. Silas sat down.

Cecilia's lips twitched, struggling to hold back a grin. "Now, Mrs. Williams, surely you don't mean that," she said, her eyes round with delighted approval. "Especially with the dreadful news here this morning, you surely wouldn't want another—well, another *murder.*"

Laura Williams moved to close the door and Cecilia's words rushed to prevent it. "Little Joe Sykes found a woman's foot on the beach this morning!"

The door froze. Silas grated a laugh. "Hear that, Laura? Woman's foot. If you're not careful there may be two of 'em before the day's over. Both off the same side. Which is it, Cissy, left or right?"

Cecilia reached past Laura, grabbed the doorknob, and banged shut the door. She went down the steps, along the brick path to her car, got in it. "Damn him anyway! Old big-mouth Tony! Called me that to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. To my face, behind my back, down at the garage, everywhere! *Sissy!* The hell I am!" A lone skimpy tear trickled down her cheek. She swiped angrily at it, started up her car, and drove home.

In early afternoon she took another stand at her spyglass just in time to see two Sheriff's cars drive up beside Hughie's shack. A number of men got out of the cars, pulled out shovels and picks from the trunk compartments, and slowly walked toward the cliff's edge. Cecilia wasted no time heading for the action.

From the cliff's edge she watched Hughie, weighted to one side by his clam bucket, join the men. The deputies dropped their shovels and picks, pulled out cigarettes, offered one to Hughie, Hughie shaking his head. "Gabbing, wasting time," she muttered.

She cupped her hands around her mouth and yelled, "Where's your sand pails, kiddies?" The men looked around, waved good-naturedly.

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A brush of sound behind her startled her. She whirled toward it. Joe Sykes's big brute of a German Shepherd stood not more than five feet away, tongue lolling, still dragging the chain. Cecilia tensed, ready to kick, scream, or run. But the Shepherd stood, as tense as she was, flicking its gaze from the startled woman to the men on the beach.

Cecilia stamped her foot. "Git!" she ordered. The dog gave a nervous turn toward the highway, decided against it, took a few steps toward the cliff path. But Cecilia blocked it. The dog turned toward the men and began a precipitous slide down the almost sheer cliff.

The animal scrambled for control, fell sideways, and, yelping, tumbled over and over, the chain flinging against him and the cliff. He twisted sideways, trying to climb upward, and slid into a jut of earth covered with succulents some ten feet above the beach. The men laughed and snapped their fingers at the dog. The dog sat down and began licking a front foot.

Now the men tossed away their cigarettes, walked around, poking with their picks at the sandy earth high on the beach.

Above them the dog began scratching into the ledge that had caught his fall. He barked sharply, and Cecilia and the men turned to look at him. He whined, barked again, dug ferociously, hair standing in a ruff around his neck. Then he raised his head. As though in macabre greeting, a human hand dangled from his mouth.

The men rushed toward the dog, terrifying the animal. He leaped to the beach, dodged the men, and ran toward the blending of cliff into the valley, the shouts and the flinging chain urging him faster. He sped up the creek bed, the hand still in his mouth. And vanished.

The men turned back toward the ledge. A deputy stood on the shoulders of another man and scrambled onto the ledge. He dug into the succulents and came up with—*merciful God, no!* But there it was. An arm.

As in a nightmare ball game the deputy tossed the grisly object to the man below. The latter caught it and motioned toward Hughie's clam bucket. Hughie shook his head, pointing to its contents. Then, as the deputy insisted, Hughie shrugged, upended the bucket, sloshing clams and sea water onto the sand. The deputy dropped the arm into the bucket.

"Nothing else here!" the man on the ledge shouted. "Could be scattered anywhere from

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here clear to San Looey!"

"Come on down and go call the office!" one of the men below shouted back. "Ask for more men. We'll start tearing up this cliff."

The deputy slid down, headed up the path. He shook his head chidingly as he passed Cecilia. "Ladies oughtn't to be watching this. Gruesome." He went to one of the cars and put in the call.

"Phooey!" Cecilia said under her breath. She focused on the beach again. Poor old Hughie was staring at his heap of clams scattered on the sand. He shrugged again, took off his sweater, revealing a yellowish long-sleeved undershirt spotted with holes. He scooped his clams onto the sweater, rolled it into a bundle, and trudged up the cliff path. At the top Cecilia stopped him.

"Hughie, like the deputy said this morning, you see anything odd around here? Like folks who ordinarily don't come to the beach, or maybe strangers around? You're the only one lives close enough to the beach to see things like that."

He smiled sadly. "No strangers. Once in a while a child, like little Joe Sykes. But the rocks along here make swimming bad, and the fishing boats can't put out. Mostly only Hughie, combing the beach."

Her bright beady gaze bore into him. "That's right," she said. "Even for clams they don't come here. There's a better clamming beach a couple of miles south. Just you, Hughie."

He surveyed her with aloof, wry sadness. "You think old Hughie killed a lady? Maybe for her pocketbook? I give up a fortune, my wife and my friends say I'm crazy, and I come down for peace and quiet in a shack on the beach. Because the world has no more dignity, no more respect, because it's crazy for money and I'm sick of being crazy. So then Hughie finds some lady with a fat purse? Or maybe I'm a sex maniac. Did I ever treat you with anything but respect, Cecilia?"

A subtle aura of strength shone from the shabby man. She had a swift perceptive flash of past authority, hidden depth of power, which Sea Mount had whispered about but never quite believed.

"I didn't say such a thing. Whatever gave you such an idea?"

"Mrs. Pigazzi, if you think such a thing you should mention it to the Sheriff's men. Or I can."

"Don't be ridiculous!" she said angrily. Abruptly, with her

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irritation, he was merely Hughie again, ridiculous in ragged clothes and frayed tennis shoes.

Hughie smiled tentatively. "You're very pretty when you're mad. Rosy."

"I'll rosy you, twisting my words that way!"

"Oh, Cecilia, with all the sadness in the world, why should we fight? Especially here in Sea Mount, such a little place, but so few on friendly terms. I tell you, how would you like a good clam dinner tonight? I am happy to cook them, but it would be far better if you prepared them in your own beautiful way. My house is a poor place for a lady."

"Come to my house," she said briskly, mentally gauging when the fog would come in and darkness prevent binoculars from watching Hughie climb the slope to her house. "Make it no earlier than seven thirty. Now hurry, get another bucket, fill it with sea water—we don't want these clams to die." My God, everything around here is dying. I wonder how Laura and Silas are coming along?

She squinted toward the Williams house as Hughie placidly did her bidding and then put the clams in her car. No, no smoke yet.

Despite the fact that it was only Hughie coming to dinner, Cecilia primped before the bathroom mirror, dusting powder on her florid skin, smoothing on lipstick, drawing a black line around her eyelids. Too bad it's only Hughie. Still, he's a man, wishy-washy or not. Not much like old Tony. The black line gave her eyes an unfortunate predatory look, like those of a mink ready for battle. Nevertheless she had the tempting look of a firm and rosy apple.

She tied on a pink-checked apron and went to check the supper preparations. The clams were scrubbed and ready for last-minute steaming. The salad was in the refrigerator, awaiting its oil and vinegar dressing. Everything ready and not yet 7:30. Even with the fog rolling in it was still light enough for a last-minute look through her spyglass.

She went to the bay window and spun the glass around the tiny community. No activity down by the cliff. The deputies' cars were gone. Nobody walking on the lanes or in their yards. Probably all at supper.

Then she saw a truck parked outside Silas Williams' house. Two men were struggling along the narrow brick path to the back door, carrying a large kitchen range. In the back yard she could see a third man installing a bottle of gas. She

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laughed triumphantly. "So Laura won! Hard to stop a woman when she makes up her mind. Finally."

She watched the men go into the house, at last come out, turn on their headlights, drive away, dim in the settling fog. Then she saw a shadowy figure move out of the mist which covered the highway and slowly climb the slope toward her house. Old Hughie, shuffling along as if he was still in beach sand. Some big-shot financier these days for sure; my God, Cecilia, some boy friend!

"What a day for sorrow and trouble," Hughie said when he came in. "Now Silas Williams is hurt. Had to be driven to the doctor in Half Moon Bay. Cut his hand slicing a ham."

Cecilia snorted, her little black eyes rolling back and forth gleefully. "Only a doctor? Lucky the stingy old goat didn't get driven to the morgue."

"It wasn't that bad a cut," Hughie said. "Deep, though, Ed Grimes said when I was in the store. Ed had to drive him, Mrs. Williams can't drive. Silas told Ed the knife slipped and sliced his arm. Bad cut. Right arm, too."

Cecilia giggled. "Left-handed, huh?"

Hughie squinted, and thought. When his eyes relaxed, Cecilia watched a knowledge within them drop into a slot and file itself. Hughie shrugged. "Who knows? Does it matter? It's a bad cut."

"The deputies find anything else on the beach?"

Hughie shook his head. "Nothing. They'll be back tomorrow to search farther up and down the shore."

"It could be gangsters. But I'll bet you ten to one some crazy hippie from San Francisco did it. Maybe a whole bunch of crazies. The world's gone crazy. Mobs, riots, bombings, psychos all over the place." She sighed. "And now messing up this nice quiet little spot."

"Money," Hughie said. "Money causes all the trouble. Some like it too much. And some hate it too much. Well, I have to admit it. I'm this much of a hippie. I hate money."

Cecilia fought down a snort of laughter. This much of a hippie! Boy, oh, boy, you were a hippie before these kids started!

Cecilia put on the clams to steam with herbs and garlic, split a loaf of sour French bread, slathered it with garlic butter, then put the loaf in a warm oven.

"A nice way with a house you have," Hughie said. "Such a pretty, clean kitchen. No doubt you had happy times."

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Here it comes, next thing he'll be wanting to move in.

Cecilia sighed heavily. "Indeed, indeed. Well, I'm alone now but I've been too well trained to let things slide. Between Mama and Tony, I mean. Mama said, you clean the house, give your man good food, be nice to him, you always got him around. And then both Mama and me are finally widows."

She shook her head ruefully at the irony of life. "And Tony—well, to tell the truth, Tony was a regular slob in some ways. You know how a hard-working man can get. Too tired to walk to the bathtub. But fussy about his food, oh my! He sure kept up Mama's training. How Tony could eat!" She sighed again. "That's what killed him, the doctor said."

Hughie's face drooped in sympathy. "A man so big and strong. It must have been a terrible shock how quickly he went. Sick one day, gone the next."

Her eyes misted. "Started with only a cold, and then—but that's the type, the doctor said. The fat ones die, the measly ones last because the strong don't watch themselves. I tell you, Hughie, when I found Tony lying across that oven door—it's still sprung, never has worked right since—it really shook me. Like I told the doctor, I'd kept Tony in bed and fed him there, then I went outside to hang up a few clothes. But Tony had such an appetite he couldn't wait for a minute till I got back. Traipsed out to the kitchen for a refill. Anyway, poor guy, he thought his chest pains were only from his bad cold. Besides, he was crazy for chili. I'd cooked up some for myself but he had to have it even though I'd begged him, Tony, how about some poached eggs? So I was coming in with the clothes basket when I heard this thud. I rushed in. There was Tony on the oven door, with chili spilled all over the floor."

"Dear Mrs. Pigazzi, you shouldn't talk about it."

She waved him quiet, annoyed at the interruption.

"Believe me, I had a time cleaning this kitchen before the doctor got here. And all the time having to look at Tony, just lying there. Too heavy to lift. Anyway, no pulse, blue in the face. Like suffocated, you know. Heart stopped."

Hughie nodded, in helplessness rather than in encouragement.

"And that doctor, you should have heard him bawl me out! Said spicy beans was no good for a man with chest pains. Said gas had pressed his

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heart, that a fat man's heart is already strained. Well, I tell you, that was a night."

An insistent and delicious smell blended from clams, herbs, and garlic pervaded the kitchen. "Everything's about ready," Cecilia said, cheerful once more. "Sit at the table, Hughie. I'll pour your coffee."

As Hughie went to the table he asked idly, "Where's your little dog? That cute little white terrier, used to follow Tony's truck sometimes? He must be company for you."

Cecilia's round face became suddenly gaunt with tragedy. "Don't talk about him, it still gets me. My poor little Pepi died the same night Tony went." Oh, my poor baby dog, why did you gobble up that chili before I got in the house? I never thought it would be spilled on the floor. I always fed you good, baby. But you had to gobble it up and get poisoned by your own Mama! And me breaking my heart, having to hide your little body and bury you in the night.

Hughie clucked sympathetically. "Heartbroken over Tony."

Her voice rasped, "He wasn't Tony's dog! He hardly ever followed Tony's truck. Pepi was *my* dog."

The passion in her voice made Hughie squirm uneasily. She noticed this and said flatly, "Let's eat now. Forget that night."

But her harsh, enigmatic emotion hovered over them. Hughie picked at his food, while on her part Cecilia ate sullenly. Soon, however, the good food soothed her mood as well as her stomach. She looked up quizzically at Hughie, cogitating how to drop the bombshell. Well, just tell it; go ahead—Laura said to tell it.

"Hughie, Silas Williams didn't cut his own arm. Laura cut him."

Hughie put down his fork, his mouth set in stern, patriarchal disapproval. "She attacked her own husband?"

Cecilia nodded. "You've heard how stingy Silas is. Never would buy Laura a decent gas range, made her carry in wood. Driftwood, too, most of the time, won't half burn. Well, this morning when I stopped by, right in front of me Laura threatened him with a butcher knife if he tried to build another fire in the wood range. So he must have tried it. So she cut him." She nodded with satisfaction.

"Her own husband! Terrible! It's terrible to have no respect."

Like Sadie. Never giving respect, forget the love. Money-money. Slap, scream, give-me-money, bang, like I was a slot

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machine, every time she pulled the handle.

"What about a *woman* who can't stand getting no respect, Hughie Cornfeld? No consideration, slave-slave, do-this, do-that. I don't like that prissy Laura Williams, but I don't blame her for cutting him up! Pity she didn't—you crazy or something, Hughie Cornfeld, putting the blame on the woman?"

"Mrs. Pigazzi, please! It's nothing to argue about. But it's wrong for a wife to humiliate her husband. Especially in front of strangers." Dear God, how many times did Sadie do that?

Cecilia snorted. "Stranger! And Laura and me both living in Sea Mount eleven—no, twelve years!"

"A manner of speech. It would be a disgrace for a wife to do that in front of her own family."

"You got something against women? Sure, you're a man!"

Hughie stood up, blue eyes lambent with anger. "Mrs. Pigazzi, you'll excuse me."

"Hah!" She looked him over contemptuously—frayed sweater, straggly hair, baggy pants, the side of his foot showing through the broken canvas of his tennis shoe. "Why are you so mad over men not getting respect?" Deliberately, "You're not much of a man."

For an instant Hughie towered above her, his face transfixed with wrath. Then swiftly his hand delivered a heavy slap to her cheek. Her head rang with the force of the blow and her mouth fell open with shock. Then the back door slammed behind Hughie.

Cecilia picked up her cup, coffee and all, and crashed it into the door. She sprang up and in a fury of frustration kicked the door. She began to cry, holding her cheek. "Sissy! Sissy!" she blubbered. "Damn old sissy, just like Tony, hitting women!"

Outside, Hughie stumbled down the hill, cross-cutting empty lots. Above, high on the hill, he heard Joe Sykes's big Shepherd baying mournfully. Hughie shivered. The terrible look when the dog ran off with *it* today! Like waving goodbye.

He started nervously as he came even with the Williams house. A shadowy figure was on the front steps. Its head raised and the light filtering through the front-window blinds picked up a nimbus of sandy-gray hair. Silas.

"Good evening," Hughie said. "I heard you cut yourself. I'm sorry."

Silas growled, "You're sorry! I'm the one cut."

"True, true. But I'm sorry it happened."

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"Damn knife slipped."

Hughie nodded. "A sharp knife is dangerous. I've often cut myself when I'm cleaning fish." The man's right-handed; I've seen him work on a tire down at the garage. "I do hope you feel much better in the morning. Good night." Compulsively he added, "Sir." At least the man could have that much respect.

He hurried toward his shack, pursued by a nightmare of raging women. But the nightmare outran him. When he went inside and shut the door, there it was facing him.

Dear Lord, why had Sadie finally traced him to this lost and lonely place? Digging up, like a terrier, this lost and lonely man? Whining and crying she'd spent all his money, that he should come back and make more. Slapped him, spit at him even, when he tried to explain a man can't make money when he hates money. And hates the men who make it, including himself. And hated her, the slapping, screeching, disrespectful money-snatcher! Yes, Sadie, I hated you—me, who could be a loving man, I hated you.

No dignity. No respect. Treating a man like a slot machine.

The nightmare had opened its arms, clasped him in hateful embrace, slavered at his face until he was dripping wet with perspiration.

The same way it had started tonight with that fat wicked-eyed Cecilia; the rage—no, not rage, surely it was righteous anger—had filled his soul. But Cecilia wasn't important. Once anyway, Sadie had been important. That had made his anger worse . . .

After the anger was spent, Sadie was gone. Nothing was left but flesh, dead flesh, to be got rid of. The foot? It must have slipped out of the sack while he scrambled up the cliff. God knows it had been a frantic dark time, struggling in the fog, with his self-hatred chasing him.

As the Sheriff's deputy had said, hidden from here clear to—was it Half Moon Bay or farther, to St. Louis? How far can a man, sick with disgust and fear, walk and climb in the night?

He began scrubbing his shack again as he had three nights before. The floor, the age-pocked walls. He scanned every crack, every crevice, the table, the bed, the stove, for any shred of garment, bead, earring, anything.

He found nothing. But his care was hopeless. He knew that. There was the taxi man who had driven her to the shack late that night. The taxi man

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hadn't waited. Sadie had sent him away. Then she had threatened Hughie to stay in Sea Mount until he came to his senses. Well, the taxi man would read the papers or hear the radio and remember his late-at-night passenger. Or a friend, a neighbor, a bank, an apartment-house superintendent—*someone* would worry about what had happened to Sadie Cornfield.

Then one of them would remember Hughie.

Then someone else would recall the thing on the beach.

And always there would be himself remembering. Is this dignity, Hughie Cornfeld? You like respect so much, but do you respect yourself?

He sighed deeply at his own questions, shrugged helplessly.

Then he got fresh water and began scrubbing his shack again.

'Q'

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a *NEW* short-short by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

People running on the streets of New York is not that common a sight—hurrying, yes, pushing, shouldering, elbowing, yes. But running, and being pursued by others running—that's still enough to catch a bystander's attention . . .

ROOKIE COP

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Three of them were running ahead and two were running behind. People running aren't that common on the streets of New York, but anyway it was really the woman who first caught my eye. Everything about her said "rich suburbanite who doesn't have to worry about looking like the latest fashion"—everything, that is, except her mouth. It was a nice-looking mouth, but it didn't go with the rest of her.

For example, it didn't go with her sensible low-heel shoes, without which she certainly wouldn't have been able to run at that speed. And then—not to make too much of my eye for detail, though that's good, it has to be in my business—the fact is, I would have kept on looking anyway. And so would you if you saw two men and a woman running fast, and right behind them two other men running—one of them a cop and the other one yelling, "Stop thief!"

So I decided to follow and see what would happen.

It was the young cop's scene, so I took my time.

He had them braced, palms up and flat against a wall, by the time I caught up. The fellow who'd been yelling "Stop thief!" was standing back and wiping his face. He looked like a middle-aged businessman, which is what he turned out to be. The young cop half turned his head to look at me, and I could see that not only was his face blank, his mind had evidently gone blank, too.

I opened my hand and

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showed him the shield, and right away his face changed and started waking up again.

"Boy, am I glad to see you!" he said.

"Leary, Third Precinct," I said. "All right, move along now," I snapped to the rubbernecks. Maybe it doesn't take much to collect a crowd in New York, but it usually doesn't take much to break one up, either. Because they've seen it all.

"You're new," I said to the cop.

"My first day."

It showed. More than the new uniform, his first day out of rookie costume showed. He clearly couldn't remember what to do next. I gave a little sigh and showed him. First I frisked all three, taking just a little extra time with the woman. A pleasure. She even said, "Oh, please." I almost looked around for the movie cameras. Then I said to the young cop, "Okay. Now you'd better handcuff them together."

Which he did. Not exactly deftly—"No, the two men together," I had to tell him.

The woman said, "Oh, thank you," and even started to walk away; maybe she thought it was my first day, too. I said, "Get back there," and she did, but trying out a look on me. Real anguish, tears in the eyes—but that mouth just didn't fit. It was the mouth of a woman who had been around. All the way around.

Next I gave "Stop thief!" some attention. "Who're you?" I asked.

He stopped wiping his face and jumped. Then he said, "The jewelry store—corner of Eighty-third—Brody's the name. They *come* in, the three of them *come* in and say, 'Let's see some bracelets.' *No*—he and she come in, the other one was already—"

This could go on forever. I said, "Let's have your card, Mr. Brody . . . Okay. We'll get in touch with you when we—"

"Yes! Yes! I better get right back, just my son is there and he don't—"

A gentle shove to Mr. Brody and off he went. Not relieved, just went. Who knows if by the time he got back, maybe the store had really been robbed or maybe the son had taken off and gone to California to be a hippie or something.

"All right, officer, now let's see who they are." And now let's see if his mind had started working again the way it should.

It had. He got their wallets and opened them and looked and then handed them to me. Not a word out of either; they were already calling their

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lawyers in their minds. The woman started leaning against me a little, but I gave her a gentle shove, too. Then I looked at the names on the cards. As you might expect, there were quite a few names *and* cards, credit and otherwise. And not just cards and credit, either.

I shrugged. "No one I know. Not that it matters. Okay, I'll go phone for a wagon. What's your name, officer?"

"Boberick, sir."

Then I looked at the woman. "My day off. No cuffs with me. No bracelets for the lady? Okay, lady. Let's go." I took hold of her elbow. Then I turned back to the new cop.

"And don't worry about this, Boberick. Everyone's got to have a first time, right?"

A little bit ashamed, a whole lot relieved, and a great big grin. "Right. Yes, sir. And thanks a lot."

"Let's go, lady," I said again. And off we went.

I was right about her, too. She'd been around all right. All around. It was thanks to her that those two in the handcuffs had all those high-denomination bills in their wallets. All that I'd had in *my* wallet was that shield I'd picked up a while back. Lots of ideas, that woman. Lots of fun, too. After she and I finish with Sun Valley I think we'll move on to Lake Tahoe.

Or maybe Acapulco. Plenty of suckers. All around.

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Can it happen here? Even in the future? . . .

THE FORBIDDEN WORD

by R. L. STEVENS

Gregory had not visited Los Angeles since the summer of 1978, and the changes he now found were a bit unnerving. True, the reconstruction was almost complete, the signs of disaster had nearly vanished; but there was about the city a certain strangeness which he could not at first pinpoint.

Driving in from the airport in his rented electric car, he was aware that the freeway traffic was thinner than he had remembered. At one stretch, just before turning onto Slauson Avenue, he counted only five cars ahead of him—at a time of day when he used to see hundreds.

He asked Browder about it at the office and the grayhaired regional sales manager merely shrugged. "Oh, they're trying to keep it quiet, but we all know it's happening. This building is only half occupied and nearly all the houses on my block have *For Sale* signs out. People are leaving by the thousands."

"But why?" Gregory, a stolid midwesterner, found it difficult to understand.

"The last one was the worst, really bad. People just decided they'd had enough."

"You mean the earthquake?"

Browder held up a hand. "We don't talk about it in public. God, Gregory, it's been bad out here! Haven't you read about the California Enabling Act back east?"

"I might have seen something in the newspapers," Gregory said.

"They're trying everything to minimize the danger, to get people to stay." Browder chuckled dryly. "I'm old enough to remember the depression days when I was a boy. Then they put up roadblocks to keep people *out* of the state. Now they try to keep 'em *in!*"

"Times change," Gregory agreed. "But what about business? The home office sent me out because sales have fallen off so badly. What's been happening?"

The grayhaired man shrugged again. "You need people to buy things."

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"Surely it's not that bad!"

"What have I just been telling you? Wait till the census in 1990. They can fake a lot of things, but they can't fake that. That'll tell the story. Some say it'll show a population drop of close to fifty percent."

"But the states back east are booming—they haven't room for all the people!"

"That's back east. This is out here. They have their problems and we have ours."

Gregory glanced down at the sheet of sales figures. "What should I tell the home office?"

"Just that. I can't sell to people who aren't here."

They talked longer, of many things, but when Gregory left the office he was troubled and unhappy. Los Angeles had always been one of their best markets, and if it really was dying as Browder believed, the company was in trouble.

It was the lunch hour, but the downtown streets were pleasantly uncrowded. Gregory found himself able to walk along easily without being pushed off the sidewalk—so unlike the midtown pedestrian jams in New York and Chicago. He almost wondered if this might be a good, uncluttered place to live—but then he remembered the people who were leaving, and the reason they were leaving.

"Hello, there," a girl's voice said at his side. He turned and saw a pretty blonde who seemed vaguely familiar. When she noted his uncertainty she explained, "I'm Mr. Browder's secretary. You probably didn't notice me in the outer office."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't. My name is Gregory."

"I know. I'm Lola Miller. Are you going somewhere for lunch?"

"Do you know a good place?"

"The office girls usually eat at the Sunset Lounge. It's only a block away."

"Sounds good. Would you join me?"

"Glad to. I enjoy company while I eat."

Lola Miller was in her midtwenties, with that sunny California beauty that recalled the movie queens of the 1950s. He liked her smile and the way she had of showing one dimple in her left cheek in a sort of lopsided grin.

"It's nearly ten years since I've visited L.A.," he said, seating himself opposite her at one of the little tables.

"It's almost rebuilt now, isn't it? You wouldn't know anything had happened."

"Apparently the people know. I understand they're leaving."

She nodded. "Terrible for

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business, isn't it? Pretty soon we'll be a ghost state. I suppose that's why they had to pass all those laws."

"The California Enabling Act? Browder mentioned it."

"It's terrible, but necessary. Something had to be done after the last disaster." She pressed the button for the waitress. "All those scare headlines in the papers, everybody talking so much—that's when the real panic started."

"You mean after the earthquake?" he asked just as the waitress appeared. Across the table Lola Miller's face suddenly drained of color. The waitress took their order and hurried back to the counter.

"You shouldn't have said that," Lola cautioned him. "Not in public. She might turn you in."

"Said what? The word earthquake? Well, that's what it was, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but we're forbidden to—"

She was cut off in midsentence by the appearance of a tall young man dressed in the style of the '70s. There was no mistaking his appearance or the tone of his voice. "Would you step outside for a moment, sir?" he asked.

"What for?"

The newcomer gave a little frozen smile and pressed a button on his flipcase, showing the gold card. "California State Police, sir. I'll have to ask you to come along quietly."

"But what have I done?"

"Greg—" Lola began, trying to interrupt.

"Reported violation of Section 45431 of the Criminal Code, sir. The California Enabling Act."

Gregory got shakily to his feet, still not believing it was really happening. "You'll have to explain it more clearly than that."

"You were heard to utter a word that it is forbidden to speak in public, sir."

"Word? What word?"

A hand of steel closed around his wrist. "Just come along quietly, sir."

Gregory looked back in despair at Lola. "I think I need a lawyer," he said.

The officer in charge was a towering hulk of a man who came right to the point. "You're in big trouble, Gregory. Conviction on a violation of 45431 carries a prison sentence of five years."

"All because I used the word *earthquake?*"

"Exactly. You used it in a public place and thereby violated the law. The word cannot be used in any periodical printed within the state of

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California or uttered in any public place."

"But that's ridiculous! You can't simply wipe a word out of the language!"

"Mr. Gregory, the future of our state is at stake here. Believe me, we're not the only place that has passed laws about what can or cannot be said in public."

"The Supreme Court—"

"The Supreme Court itself once stated that no one had the right to yell 'Fire' in a crowded theater. Likewise, during the airplane bombings and hijackings some twenty years ago, no one had the right to talk about bombs while flying on a plane. Men were arrested for joking about a bomb in their luggage or saying they were going to take the plane to Cuba."

"But—"

The officer, whose name was Vitroll, cut him off with a wave of the hand. "It's the same thing here. The state is in an emergency situation. The only way to control it is to blot out all mention of what happened a few years back. After a time people will forget, and start to return."

"I'm from out of state," Gregory argued. "I had only the vaguest idea of the law here."

"Ignorance of the law has never been recognized as an excuse in a court of law. In fact, it might go harder on you being from the east. It's all that eastern propaganda causing us the trouble in the first place. Eastern magazines and newspapers and television, always talking about things out here, about the disaster and how it's sure to happen again."

"I'm not exactly an easterner. I'm from a suburb of Chicago."

"That's east to us," Vitroll said, moving his hulk from the edge of the desk. "I'll have to book you."

"How much will the bail be?"

"That's up to the judge. In cases where it seems likely the offense will be repeated, no bail is granted."

"All this for just saying a word?"

"These are troubled times, Mr. Gregory. The survival of the state is at stake."

He went away then, leaving Gregory alone in the room. For a time there was nothing to do but ponder the position in which he found himself. Surely a call to the home office would bring him the best of legal aid. This sort of thing could not go on unnoticed.

The door opened and a uniformed guard said, "Follow me, sir."

"Are you taking me to the judge?"

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"No, sir. To a cell. You'll have to wait there until it's time for your hearing."

Gregory followed reluctantly, noticing that a second guard had come up behind him. They were treating him exactly like a criminal, taking no chances. "I'm harmless," he said. "Really."

"In here."

The cell door slid shut automatically behind him and he was left alone with the gray metal walls. He walked over to the bunk and tested its lumpy surface, wondering how many had occupied it before him and for how long. Sitting there, trying to collect his thoughts, he took out his pen to make a few notes. It slipped from his numb fingers, clattering on the steel floor, and he bent to retrieve it.

That was when he noticed the word scrawled under the bunk, where the guards would not see it. Though he might have expected some obscenity in such a place, the word was much more frightening.

There, beneath the bunk, some earlier prisoner had scrawled: *earthquake.*

They took him to the courtroom, between two guards, and he looked up at the frozenfaced judge who seemed almost unaware of his presence.

"Violation of Section 45431 of the Criminal Code, your Honor. California Enabling Act," a voice behind him said.

The judge nodded slightly. "How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, your Honor." I'm from out of state. I knew nothing of this law."

"I would have thought it had been well publicized," the judge commented dryly. "Will you waive your right to a trial?"

"No, sir. I will not! I haven't even consulted a lawyer yet."

"Very well. I'll schedule the trial for October 15th—two weeks from today. Bail is set at five thousand dollars, and you are ordered not to leave the state."

"Five thousand—"

Behind him Vitroll cleared his throat. "Bail has been raised by a friend of the defendant, your Honor."

Gregory turned and saw Lola Miller standing behind the railing. He walked toward her, feeling at once the need for fresh outside air. "Thank you," he said simply.

"The company put it up," she explained, "but they didn't want their name involved."

"Thanks, anyway. I know you had a hand in it."

"I was with you when it happened. I felt some responsibility. Come on, my car is outside."

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They drove back to the office where a distracted Browder was waiting. He rose as they entered and hurried over to shake Gregory's hand. "My God, I'd thought we'd lost you! The home office would never have forgiven me! When Lola told me what happened—"

"I wasn't aware of the details of your laws out here. What happens now? I'm supposed to stay here for two weeks."

"What happens?" Browder repeated. "Why, you'll jump bail, of course! The company will stand the loss. Otherwise, believe me, it means a jail sentence."

"They've actually sent people to prison for this?"

"Dozens of them, for terms up to five years. It's not worth taking the chance, Gregory."

"No, indeed," he agreed. "I'll catch the next plane out of here."

"It might not be that easy," Lola cautioned. "They watch the airports—they have electronic surveillance systems of all sorts. Your photograph is already stored in the memory bank."

He turned to Browder. "Any suggestions?"

"Drive your rented car out of the state. To Las Vegas, maybe. Then get a plane from there."

"They don't watch the highways?"

"Only for people moving out of the state—furniture vans, things like that. You'd be safe, especially if Lola traveled with you."

"Then that's it," Gregory decided.

An hour later they were headed out of Los Angeles in the little electric car.

"I know so little about you," she said, once the car had cleared the city limits.

"There's not much to know. I'm just a man who cried earthquake and got arrested for it."

"I mean—well, are you married?"

"I was once." He gazed out at the passing landscape of cactus, thinking how little it had changed in the past hundred years. Civilization had not yet reached the back roads of eastern California. "But that was a long time ago."

"You don't like to talk about it."

"Does anyone like to talk about failures?" He was silent for a time, then said, "You're taking a chance traveling with me. If we're caught you could end up in prison, too."

"You'd never find your way alone on these back roads. Either you'd get lost or one of

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the copter patrol would spot you."

"Copter patrol?"

She pointed to the sky. "There's one now. They watch mainly for trucks and vans heading out of the state, but they could make trouble if they spotted you."

The copter, painted gold, dipped low, catching the sun, as it came in for a closer look. Apparently it saw nothing amiss, for it headed away again at once. "How far to the state line?" he asked.

"Less than an hour." Like all Californians, she gave distances in time rather than miles.

"You're sure there'll be no roadblocks?"

"Not on these back roads. And once you're across it'll be difficult for them to put their hands on you. Most states won't grant extradition for crimes committed under the California Enabling Act."

Some 45 minutes later, as they topped a rise of desert land, he saw the first billboard. "*Settle here!*" it proclaimed. "*Free from earthquake danger!*"

"That's it," Lola said, giving a little sigh. "We're across the line—in Nevada now."

"Will you be going back to California after you drop me in Vegas?"

She turned in her seat, looking at him, "You know something? I'm scared of those damned earthquakes, too. I was always afraid to admit it till now, but since I'm safely out of that place I don't think I'll be hurrying back."

"Come east with me," he said.

"I've never been east."

"All the more reason for you to go."

"Could you get me a job at the home office?"

He considered that for a moment. "There's too much of my past scattered around Chicago. Besides, they might just come looking for me for jumping bail. Maybe the company doesn't think I'm worth five thousand."

"Where, then?"

"Farther east—New York."

"With all those people?"

"It's not so bad. A lot of it is California propaganda."

They passed more billboards and presently the gleaming towers of Las Vegas came into view, like some mythic kingdom in the desert. "All right," she said finally. "I'll go east with you."

He took one hand off the steering wheel and touched her, lightly. "I'm glad."

They turned in the rented car at the Vegas airport, even though he knew it would

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indicate the direction of his flight. He was not a criminal, and had not yet learned to act like one. He was merely a man in flight, with no reason for covering his tracks.

On the plane east they held hands like teenagers of some era of long ago, and he told her what he remembered of the crowded streets of Manhattan. "There are people, sure, and sometimes it's difficult to stay on the sidewalk, but it's all worth it. The last time I was there, New York really got to me. The smallest event brings out thousands of people. It's a people's town—people everywhere!"

"And they all drive cars."

"Little electrics, smaller than in California. Traffic is still bad, though, I'll admit that. With so many people in the New York area there are times when nothing moves."

It was night when they landed at Kennedy International Airport, and close to midnight by the time they took the express subway into Manhattan. Lola was hungry, so they had something to eat in the hotel coffee shop before going up to their rooms.

"Tomorrow we'll look for an apartment, and jobs," he said.

"It's good to be here with you."

"Even with all the people?"

"Even with all the people. That other, in California—it seems like a nightmare now."

"It does, in a way," he agreed. "We've gone back a long way in this country when words can be so dangerous they have to be banned. And it's no longer the obscenities that frighten people, but a simple word like earthquake. I feel like standing up and shouting it here. Earthquake! *Earthquake!*"

She took his hand. "You know, I think I could learn to love you."

He was touched by her gentleness. "I guess I already do love you."

Later, after they'd finished eating, they left the coffee shop and headed across the lobby to the elevators. Gregory saw the two men first, waiting for them, and he was reminded of Vitroll and the others in California.

"Lola, those men!"

"What?"

But then it was too late to run. "Sorry, sir, I'll have to ask you and the lady to accompany us."

"Not her," Gregory said. "I'm the one you want."

"It's both of you we want."

Lola tried to move away, but the second man seized her arm. "Will you take us back to California?" she asked, and her voice was close to a sob.

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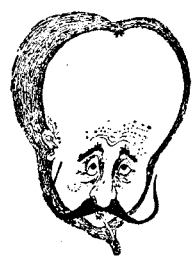
The first man frowned. "We don't know anything about California. Here's my identification. George Bates of the Population Control Board, New York City Police."

"New York? But we—"

"You were overheard using a certain word that is not in keeping with the laws of this city. A word that could be harmful, or lead to harmful acts."

"What word?" Gregory demanded, feeling his heart sink.

The man named Bates consulted a notebook. "I believe the word was . . . love."



CRIMINALIMERICK

CHRISTIE CAPSULE

by D. R. BENSEN

The heiress has vanished away;
A white-haired old dame comes to stay.
Suspects are pumped,
But everyone's stumped
Till Poirot pulls her wig off—hooray!

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This is the 368th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .a moving little tale about a runaway boy. . .

The author, Charles Blessing, was 36 when he submitted "A Certain Gift," and fully aware, he wrote, of his "late start." But he's a persevering man, God bless(ing) him. Believe it or not, he received 162 rejection slips before we accepted his "first story," and never lost his determination to be published. Almost needless to say in these circumstances, he has "an understanding wife who, when I start kicking the dog or cat around, still pats me gently on the head and speaks encouragingly." His literary tastes "run all the way from Charles Dickens at his worst to Raymond Chandler at his best," and you can always tell a lot about a person when you know that person's reading preferences . . .

A CERTAIN GIFT

by CHARLES BLESSING

As Gordon sped round the curve he saw the child, clearly and distinctly outlined against the sky, rising above the crest of the steep hill just ahead. Then the boy disappeared, sinking below the horizon into shadow as he walked steadily toward the onrushing patrol car.

The state policeman passed him and was all the way down the other side before he found a place to turn around. When he caught up, he drove on past a few feet and pulled over to the side of the road. The boy walked up to the car and stood waiting, peering in without saying a word.

Gordon stared back. The last remnants of twilight were gone and the turnpike was deserted. "You're walking on the wrong side of the road," the policeman said gruffly.

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The boy remained silent, noncommittal. He was wearing a T-shirt and blue jeans, and seemed to be totally unaware of the crisp cold night air. About twelve years old, Gordon decided, tall and skinny for his age, with short-cropped blond hair, probably blue eyes.

"You a mute?" Gordon asked.

But the sarcasm was wasted. "No, sir," the boy answered, the words rolling out on a stream of condensed air.

"I'm glad. Do you have a name?"

"Yes, sir."

Gordon waited, then said, "What is it?"

"Charles. Charles Craig."

"Mine's Gordon. Manley Gordon. They call me Flash."

"Are you going as far as Benton? It's just down the road."

"I know exactly where it is."

"May I ride that far with you?"

Gordon gave a short laugh. "Get in, said the spider to the fly."

While the boy walked around to the other side of the car, Gordon picked up the radio mike and spoke quickly to the dispatcher: "It's nothing, Fred, but see if you've got a pickup on a Charles Craig, possible runaway. I'll call *you.*"

"Ten-four," Fred intoned.

The boy got in without having heard, and they moved off down the turnpike.

"Home for Christmas?" Gordon said after a bit.

"Yes, sir."

"Been away long?"

"Ever since yesterday."

"All that time." Gordon glanced at the boy, who looked confused. "If you're going home, you must be coming from somewhere."

"Yes, sir."

This one wasn't exactly a mine of information, Gordon thought. "Where might that be?"

"Hot Springs."

"That's a hundred miles. Pretty far for a boy your size."

"Too far."

"I should think so. Know anyone there?"

"No, sir."

"Then why bother?"

"The races, mostly."

Gordon looked at the boy sharply. "Now, listen, Charles, they don't let boys your age in to see the races by themselves." For that matter, the track was closed this year. "There's no reason for me not to take you all the way home, but you mustn't tell stories. Don't forget, I'm a trained police officer. I know all the answers before I even ask."

"Then why bother?"

Gordon looked to see if he

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was being laughed at, then laughed at himself. "All part of the training. When in doubt, ask stupid questions."

They drove along in silence for a while. From time to time the policeman would look at the boy, who kept his eyes steadily on the road ahead. Something about the child bothered him. He'd taken plenty of nervous young boys home before, and they all had some wild tale or other to tell. But it wasn't that; it was something else, some ill-defined feeling Gordon couldn't put his finger on.

"To tell the truth," the boy suddenly volunteered, "we hopped a freight train over there."

"Just hold it. Who is *we?*"

"My friend Eric. Eric Paul Bowen."

"Of course. How stupid of me. Eric P. Bowen of Benton."

"You know him?"

"Never heard of him."

"He lives at the Children's Home. He's done it before, lots of times."

They were beginning to enter the small village of Benton. "You'll have to show me the way," Gordon said.

"Turn left at Fernwood," the boy instructed, "then go down Chatham four blocks."

"Where is Eric P. Bowen now, Charles?" Gordon asked.

The boy hesitated. "He decided to stay," he said quietly.

"What do you mean, stay?"

The boy continued to stare out the window as they moved along the quiet street. Here and there house lights were augmented by multicolored Christmas decorations. A light fog had set in, causing all the street lamps to project little blue and white halos. "It's all right," he said finally. "You see, he didn't have any real home to come back to." Then he shouted, "There it is!"

Gordon pulled up in front of a neat white frame house. A porch light was on, but there was no holly on the door, or any other sign that Christmas was being celebrated within. He turned to face the boy. "I think I'd better see you inside. They're probably worried to death about you."

"No!" the boy said in alarm. "It might spoil things." He seemed agitated, ready to bolt from the car.

"It sure might, because you haven't been telling me the truth, have you?"

"Not all of it, maybe. But it's all right, Mr. Gordon, honest it is."

"You two could have gotten into all kinds of trouble and you're old enough to know it. As it is, now I've got to waste

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my valuable time finding out about your pal Eric."

"Yes, sir, you do that!" the boy said, then quickly added, "But it's Christmas, you said so yourself."

"What if I did?" Gordon snapped, irritated by the boy's impertinence. "It doesn't necessarily follow that I believe in it."

The boy flinched, as though he'd been slapped. "You don't believe in Christmas?" he said in wonder.

"I believe in what I can see." It was still there, that feeling he couldn't rid himself of—and why was it making him sound so bitter?

"Some things you've got to believe in without seeing," the boy said.

"That requires a—well, a certain gift," Gordon said, "a certain kind of person."

"My father said just one thing was enough. You could build on that, then everything else would fall in place. He *told* me that!" It sounded like a plea.

Was the boy lecturing him, Gordon wondered. At this point it was supposed to be the other way around. "It's a nice thought," he admitted. "Your father must be a very nice man."

"Yes, sir," the boy said absolutely.

"All right, then," Gordon relented, "you promise never to—"

"Yes, *sir*, I promise!"

Such a tired, hungry look on the boy's face. "Okay, cowboy. Just don't leave town again. See you around sometime."

"Thanks, Mr. Gordon, and thanks for the ride."

The boy was out of the car and running up the steps almost before Gordon had time to shift into gear and drive away. Kids, he thought, pulling back onto the turnpike, they'll do and tell you anything these days.

Except that he remembered how he and Jim Rice had done almost the identical thing. And then spent most of the night trying to hitch a ride home. Finally they had given up and gone to sleep under a haystack till morning. A thousand years ago, it seemed now. Sleeping out in the open like that and not being the least bit afraid. You took a lot for granted when you were young. He felt a warm glow just remembering those good times.

You forget so much as the years rush by. Things that should be remembered always. Like what a wonderful thing it is just to be a child—something very different from being a man. How had the poet put it? To be a child is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to

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believe in belief; to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything—for each child has its own fairy godmother already built into its soul.

He had told the boy it took a special gift to believe in belief. Yes, that was why he'd felt so bitter—a gift given to you as a child, then taken from you all too soon.

A speeding car flew past. Gordon, deep in thought, was jerked back to reality. He grabbed the mike from its holder.

"Fred, call Benton and tell them to watch out for some maniac in a blue sedan. Oh, and about the kid I called in to you. Check on an Eric Bowen from the Children's Home there. The Craig boy is home safe and sound."

The dispatcher's voice came back loud and metallic. "I don't think that's funny, Flash."

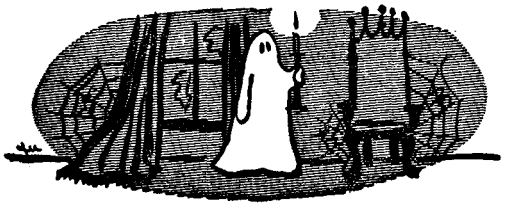
"What's that, Fred?"

The patrol car swept under a group of high-voltage power lines. The radio crackled with a sudden surge of static, then went silent.

"What, Fred—what did you say?"

"Both those kids were found dead Christmas Eve in a gondola car, where a load of pipe shifted on them."

As Gordon sped round the curve—for a moment, for one brief moment—he saw the child, clearly and distinctly outlined against the sky, rising above the crest of the steep hill just ahead.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 369th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Can a story about sleep be solid and substantial? Or would it, like a dream, more likely be filmy and impalpable? This story, however, is about sleeplessness, *and you'll find it as solid and substantial as wide-awakeness, and with a strong narrative grip. . .*

The author, Allan R. Brown, was born in Tennessee. While a young man he worked as a gandy dancer, miner, fruit picker, marble cutter, and claim adjuster. Later, after studying accounting and business administration, he was an office manager and sales manager. He has traveled widely in the United States, Canada, Mexico, France, and England—the last named undoubtedly explaining the locale of his "first story," a surprising choice of background for an American . . .

SLEEP NO MORE

by ALLAN R. BROWN

There were three other patients in the room, and when they accidentally caught each other's eyes they hurriedly looked away and buried their faces in an old *Sphere* or *Tatler*. Miss Featherstone was the only one who made no pretense of reading. She had always wondered what people would be like who came to consult an eminent brain specialist, and she studied the others with disconcerting straightforwardness. But they all seemed depressingly normal. No one stood on his head or stuck out a tongue at her.

Miss Featherstone herself was one of those aloof, austere tweedy spinsters you would expect to meet in a Devonshire lane with two dogs behind her. And that, as it happened, was the exact place where normally you would have found her.

When her turn came she followed the nurse into Sir Gilbert Chamberlain's consulting room. Sir Gilbert, who looked more like an admiral than an alienist, started.

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"Why, Miss Featherstone!" he exclaimed, rising. "I never dreamed it was you when I heard the name." He had met Miss Featherstone at Grindelwald and had learned to respect her powers both with the curling stone and the human tongue.

Miss Featherstone shook his hand. "It's me, all right," she answered shortly. "But don't imagine there's anything wrong with me. I'm never ill. I don't believe in it."

Sir Gilbert smiled and invited her to sit down. He wasn't convinced by this remark. His patients often began that way.

Miss Featherstone plumped herself in the chair beside his desk. He too sat down and leaned forward in an attentive professional manner.

"Now, don't put on airs just because you're in your consulting room," Miss Featherstone said sharply. "And don't look at me as though I were sex-starved or some nonsense of that kind! I've come to ask a straight question and I want a straight answer."

Sir Gilbert laughed. "All right, all right," he replied. "You've won, as usual. What can I do to help you?"

Miss Featherstone drew a deep breath. "The thing I want to know is just this," she began. "What is sleep?"

Sir Gilbert's eyebrows went up with a jerk. With most people he would have gone into a long explanation using many technical words, but he knew that with Miss Featherstone it was much safer to tell the truth. "We don't really know," he answered.

"Just what I might have expected," Miss Featherstone remarked with disgust. "I've always found you doctors know everything about every disease except the one one's got."

"So you're suffering from insomnia?" Sir Gilbert became professional again.

"No, I'm not," Miss Featherstone rapped back. "I sleep very well. But I want to learn about sleep. Don't you know *anything* about it?"

"Yes, we know quite a lot," Sir Gilbert said. "We know it can be induced by different drugs and staved off by continual exercise. We know—or at least we think we know—that the sleep center is located in a certain part of the brain called the hypothalamus. Some authorities believe it is caused by a change in the calcium content of the blood, but that isn't by any means proved."

"H'm!" Miss Featherstone snorted. "And where's this hypothalamus thing?"

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Sir Gilbert pointed to a spot at the back of his head.

"And what does it look like?"

"It's just gray matter like the rest of the brain."

"H'm. That doesn't help *me* much." Miss Featherstone paused, then asked, "Do you know if anyone has ever died naturally from lack of sleep?"

"There's no medical record of a man dying from it."

"D'you mean a woman has, then?"

"No, no, but healthy dogs have died after being kept sleepless for fourteen days."

Miss Featherstone glared at him. "Do you mean to say you have dared to do a thing like that to *dogs?*"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Sir Gilbert answered calmly. "And to rabbits, too. The rabbits, being less high-strung, lasted longer—twenty-one days, as a rule."

"So there's no reason why human beings shouldn't die of it in the same way?"

"No, none at all. In fact, there are very good grounds to believe that the Chinese—and I'm sorry to say, the Scots as well, Miss Featherstone—used to torture their enemies to death by this method."

Miss Featherstone pressed her lips tightly together and remained silent. Sir Gilbert was studying her closely. She wasn't the kind of woman who would consult a brain specialist for some trivial reason. There was serious trouble somewhere.

"Why are you asking me these strange questions, Miss Featherstone?"

"I'm asking them," Miss Featherstone said harshly, "because my niece has been murdered."

Sir Gilbert's eyebrows shot up again. "Murdered!"

"Yes, murdered," Miss Featherstone replied. "My niece died three weeks ago. There was no reason why she should have died. She had always been unusually strong and healthy. But she died because she couldn't get any sleep."

"Is that what the doctors said, Miss Featherstone?"

"No, it isn't!" Miss Featherstone snorted again. "They just certified she was dead."

"Was there no trace of disease?"

"No, nothing. She just suddenly stopped sleeping and in three weeks she was dead."

"You say it happened suddenly, this sleeplessness?"

Miss Featherstone gave a snap of the fingers. "Just like that!"

"And there was no suggestion of drugs?"

"None, she was terrified of them."

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"But in those circumstances, surely there must have been an inquest?"

"Of course there was. But what was the good? She was dead by then. And any fool could have said it was from natural causes."

Sir Gilbert gazed thoughtfully at her. "Why do you say your niece was murdered, Miss Featherstone?"

"Because it wasn't natural," Miss Featherstone spoke firmly. "I brought Sybil up and I ought to know. No one was ever more abounding in animal health; she hadn't a nerve in her whole body or a doubt in her mind. Sybil was a beautiful girl, Sir Gilbert, and a bad one. She ran away from me when she was eighteen and started to live the life in London. She was going to have a baby when she died. A bad girl, but that's no reason why anyone should be allowed to murder her!"

"Quite so," Sir Gilbert agreed. "But isn't it a big jump to say she was *murdered?*"

"No, it isn't. You've told me yourself that no one has ever died of sleeplessness naturally."

"But you can't definitely say that she *did* die of sleeplessness," Sir Gilbert protested.

"Yes, I can. Anyone who saw her at the end couldn't help knowing what killed her. The engine in her ran on and on until it just couldn't run any longer. It was horrible to see."

"Very well." Sir Gilbert tried to humor her. "Let's admit she died of sleeplessness. What then?"

"Just this. Somebody has learned more about sleep than you have. Someone's discovered how to destroy it."

"Miss Featherstone, really, there are no grounds at all for a supposition like that!"

"Sybil's dead, isn't she? That ought to be grounds enough for anyone. Are you prepared to say categorically that if you injured this hypothalamus thing it wouldn't destroy the power to sleep forever?"

"Yes, I am prepared to say it—quite categorically. If that were possible, it would have the opposite effect. It would probably induce a state of coma."

Miss Featherstone was not defeated. "Well, then," she went on, "if you succeeded in stimulating it instead of destroying it, what effect would you expect?"

Sir Gilbert made a grimace. "That might produce sleeplessness," he admitted. "But such a thing has never been done."

"Are you prepared to say definitely it can't be done?"

Sir Gilbert gazed at her helplessly. "No, I'm not prepared to say it."

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Miss Featherstone fumbled with her bag, then stood up. "That's all I want to know."

Sir Gilbert conducted her to the door. He still felt uneasy; she was a determined woman who might do something foolish. "If you'll take my advice, Miss Featherstone—" he began.

"I never take advice," she told him. "And I'm going to find out who murdered Sybil. I really came to you as a kind of insurance."

"Insurance?"

"Yes. If I get into any trouble I'm going to tell them that I'm a patient of yours, and you'll have to come and say I'm not quite right in the head. I expect you'll do that gladly. Well, goodbye, Sir Gilbert. I'll see you at Grindelwald—if not sooner."

Sir Gilbert thought of this interview on several occasions during the next few days. It troubled him to think there might be anything wrong with Miss Featherstone's mind, yet this certainty that her niece had been murdered was very like one of those fixed ideas that crop up in so many different kinds of mania.

But all the same, her theory was interesting. There was a lot of research going on about sleep. It wasn't beyond the bounds of possibility that in trying to create sleep someone might have discovered how to destroy it. And what a power that would be in the hands of an unscrupulous person! The undetectable poison at last!

The whole idea was so arresting that Sir Gilbert decided he must discuss it with his friend, the Assistant Commissioner, and see what the police had to say about such a possibility. If he had done this, he would have learned that the police had far more to say about it than he had ever dreamed. But it was one of those meetings that should have taken place but never did.

In the course of official inquiries into drug deaths the police had come across two cases in the past three years which still worried them. Both cases involved young girls who had suddenly been struck with acute insomnia. The Assistant Commissioner kept the reports before him for a whole month.

Sybil's case had not been known to the police. Unlike Sybil, the other girls hadn't held out; each had taken an overdose of drugs—drugs legitimately prescribed by their doctors.

But there were two disturbing factors: in both cases there had been no previous history of insomnia and both girls had been friends of a certain doctor

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Arthur Hussman, a radiologist with a good practice. He treated rheumatism and sinusitis with some kind of newfangled ray. The Assistant Commissioner had gone to his office in Harley Street and had some ray treatments for fibrositis. But everything seemed to be correct and aboveboard.

Yet Dr. Hussman was a sinister person, and he had a bad reputation with regard to his love affairs. The Assistant Commissioner was pretty well satisfied the doctor was the kind who would gladly wipe his girl friends off the face of the earth when he was tired of them; and the A.C. was by no means convinced that in all that medley of apparatus the doctor did not have some secret means of doing just that.

But believing is not proof. All the police had to go on was that one girl had been to Dr. Hussman for treatment and that the other girl had spent a weekend with him just before her deadly insomnia began. That was something, but not nearly enough. The Assistant Commissioner finally put the papers away.

He had just sat down at his desk when the telephone rang. It was a Detective Inspector from Marlborough Street, and he said they had a woman there charged with assault. "She's a patient of Sir Gilbert Chamberlain's," the voice went on. "A bit barmy, I should say."

"Then get in touch with Sir Gilbert and don't bother me."

"Very good, sir. Just thought you'd like to know the party she assaulted is our friend Hussman."

The Assistant Commissioner jumped up at once and took his hat from the peg.

Miss Featherstone was not the kind of woman who worried about such trifles as the rules of evidence. She had no idea of the existence of Dr. Hussman at the time she interviewed Sir Gilbert. Sybil had been as hard as nails, and even when dying she hadn't told her aunt anything of her life or the various men in it. That was entirely Miss Featherstone's idea. Miss Featherstone had been a nurse in France during the war. She had seen men mortally hit, had seen the startled incredulous look in their eyes. That same look had been in Sybil's eyes for three weeks.

This had all begun in Devonshire, as far as Miss Featherstone was concerned. Sybil had just arrived, without warning, saying she was tired and needed a rest. No explanations given. It was only the end of the first week then, but the startled incredulous look was

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already in her eyes, and it stayed and grew.

Miss Featherstone watched in helpless bewilderment. Four days and nights of incessant wakefulness, then Sybil hurried back to London like a hunted creature, and Miss Featherstone panted after. Doctors, specialists. But Sybil wouldn't touch the drugs they prescribed. She began going to night clubs again, back to her old haunts.

Miss Featherstone had followed, herself sick for lack of sleep, and watched her niece slowly dying on her feet. It was in a night club at three in the morning that the words first flitted into Miss Featherstone's mind:

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep!"

Two days later Sybil was dead. The inquest followed. Miss Featherstone told them all she knew and held her tongue about what she thought. But the conviction was growing in her that something was wrong.

Once she had made up her mind she was like a bloodhound on the trail. Sybil's past life began to come into view. Men, men, and more men! Miss Featherstone was shocked at the number of them and the way Sybil had treated them. A heartless little sensualist, and a golddigger, too! If one of these men had shot her or stuck a knife in her, Miss Featherstone would have been prepared to drop it. But it hadn't been done cleanly like that; and Miss Featherstone went on.

It was from one of these men—a young fellow who had really loved Sybil and wanted to marry her—that Miss Featherstone first heard of Dr. Hussman. She learned the doctor had spent a weekend with Sybil just before it all happened. So she went to Harley Street.

Miss Featherstone had changed her character for this interview. She was no longer her brisk self, but a frail vague old lady who leaned on a heavy ebony walking stick. Dr. Hussman was a dark delicate man of about 35, with small feet and hands and immense nervous energy. He received her with professional apathy.

After a nervous glance at all the couches and chairs, the bulbs, coils, and projectors in the room, she sat down on the chair he indicated. Dr. Hussman wanted to know her age, if she was married, her operations, where she lived, her occupation.

Finally he asked, "And now what is the exact trouble, Miss Featherstone?"

Miss Featherstone told him,

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in rather garrulous fashion, what she had rehearsed before her looking glass. "I just can't keep awake, Doctor. It's been like that for months now. When I pick up a book or my sewing or anything, I suddenly doze off. It even happens when I'm talking to people. And it's very embarrassing. I know I'm getting old, Doctor, but even so, it isn't natural to be like that, is it?"

"No, it isn't natural," he agreed. "If you'll just take off your hat I'll examine you before we go any further."

Miss Featherstone took off her hat; he got up and came around behind her. She had to brace herself for the ordeal. Apart from her suspicions she found him physically repulsive; there was something evil about his greedy eyes. And now his hands were exploring the back of her neck. Very gently. But she could feel the tensile strength in them. She thought of those hands on Sybil's body, wondered if he already knew she was Sybil's aunt, and she shuddered.

"Is that a sensitive place?" he asked.

"No, no," Miss Featherstone answered.

"But you jumped then, didn't you?"

"It was nothing. I'm afraid I've always been high-strung."

"Oh, indeed! Well, there's nothing to worry about. I'm not going to hurt you."

The hands continued their exploration. A few more questions. Any pain here? Any stiffness there? Then they stopped. Dr. Hussman sat down at his desk.

"What made you come to *me*, Miss Featherstone?"

There was a suspicious look in his eyes now, and Miss Featherstone answered warily.

"Well, Dr. Uttley—he's our family doctor—he sent me up to see Sir Gilbert Chamberlain. And Sir Gilbert sent me to you."

"Oh! I don't remember that Sir Gilbert has sent me any of his patients before."

"Well, he said you'd had some very successful results. I do hope you can do me some good, Doctor."

She looked at him earnestly and was relieved to see that the suspicious look had vanished from his eyes.

"I'm going to be quite frank with you, Miss Featherstone," he told her. "I don't know definitely that I can cure you; but if I can, then I can do it easily."

"Is the treatment very expensive?" she asked nervously.

"The treatment is five guineas a time, but you won't

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require more than three. If I have not been successful after three treatments I shall know you are not susceptible to my methods."

"What is the treatment, Doctor?" she inquired.

"Just a ray," he replied. "A form of stimulation. Quite harmless. The first treatment will only take three minutes, so I might as well give it to you now."

Miss Featherstone felt herself go pale. She had to swallow twice before she could answer. "I'd like it now," she said at last.

She watched him get up. She was wondering which of these nightmarish instruments he was intending to use. Would it be the same one he had used on Sybil? But it wasn't any of the apparatus built into the room. Instead, he picked up a case which might have contained a portable phonograph. But the instrument inside was more like a machine gun on a stand, with a thin stumpy barrel. He arranged it behind a chair with a low back. Now he was plugging an electric cord into the wall.

Miss Featherstone clenched her teeth. It had always puzzled her how anyone could have done the damage without Sybil's knowing. But this portable thingamajig could be used anywhere. It could be plugged into a socket in a hotel bedroom. She could picture it all in her mind now: Sybil lying in bed asleep; the man beside her rising stealthily, working skillfully in the dark; and then the instrument killing her sleep—killing it while sleep was on her.

"All ready now." Dr. Hussman spoke softly. "Just step over here and sit in this chair."

Miss Featherstone walked over with the help of the ebony stick. He was bending down now, switching the current on; but no light seemed to come out of the barrel.

"Is it working?" she asked. "I don't see any light."

"This ray isn't visible to the naked eye," he explained. "Just sit down, please. You won't know anything is happening."

She sat down and tried to look behind her.

"Now, bend your neck forward a little."

She didn't move. But the nimble fingers were adjusting her head exactly where he wanted it. There was a padded chin-rest to keep the head in place. And now something cool touched the back of her head in the exact spot where Sir Gilbert had told her the hypothalamus was located.

It was too much. Her nerve failed. She slipped out of the

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chair in a realistic faint.

Of course, she hadn't really fainted at all. She wanted time to think before she risked anything more. Most apologetic she was, murmuring about a touch of the sun the day before; and Dr. Hussman had agreed she had better not start the treatment until she was quite well again. And so, still apologizing, she had escaped.

After that she spent a whole day in her hotel bedroom wondering what to do next. She was certain Dr. Hussman was the man. But how was she ever to persuade anybody else she was right? Go back to Sir Gilbert? He'd probably just pop her into a mental home. Go to Scotland Yard? A fine chance of being listened to there!

No, she would have to go on by herself. There was no other way. Risky? Yes, but she was an old woman now, and there was no reason to suppose anything very grand was still ahead of her. And she could write it all down in her diary. Then, if anything did happen, her diary would tell them everything.

She had already started writing when another idea occurred to her. By chance she had looked up and caught sight of her ebony stick, and her mind had jumped back nearly 25 years to when she was a nurse in France. That sergeant! She had known the ambulance would break down one night when they were alone together. And she had been quite right about the sergeant! Only the sergeant hadn't known how handy she was with a spanner. He was unconscious all the way back to camp, and the doctor there had congratulated her, saying she couldn't have chosen a more scientific place for her blow.

She remembered the exact spot now, and thought of Dr Hussman bending over to plug in the cord. Of course, she was older, not as strong, and the ebony stick wouldn't be as easy to handle as a spanner. Still, it ought to work.

There and then she rang up and asked for an appointment the next day. She chose the last appointment before lunch—no much risk of being interrupted at that time. She sat down again at the desk and brought her diary up to date.

It was a quarter to one when Miss Featherstone walked into Dr. Hussman's consulting room the next day. She noticed with dismay that the portable apparatus was already plugged into the wall. Dr. Hussman wouldn't have to bend down. She would have to think again—and think quickly.

She sat down at the desk.

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"I hope you've quite recovered," Dr. Hussman said pleasantly.

"Quite," Miss Featherstone replied, looking warily around. "I'm really ashamed of myself for giving such an exhibition."

The doctor made no reply. He was already adjusting the machine.

"All ready now, Miss Featherstone. If you'll just take off your hat."

Miss Featherstone took off her hat.

"Now if you'll step over to this chair."

Miss Featherstone had her left hand on the desk. There were two heavy medical books there; as she rose, her sleeve caught in them and tipped them onto the floor.

"Oh, dear, how clumsy I am!" Miss Featherstone murmured.

The doctor was at her side at once, suave and polite. "Please allow me."

Miss Featherstone allowed him. She took careful aim and brought the heavy ebony handle down on his skull. He fell, grunting, only half knocked out, and she gave him another blow before he could recover. He lay still then, and Miss Featherstone examined him. Not such a good job as she had done on the sergeant! The doctor was barely unconscious, so she gave him a third blow for luck. Then she locked the door.

After that she set to work methodically. She dragged him across to the chair and pulled him up onto it. She arranged his head on the chin-rest just as he had arranged hers. Then she focused the machine on the spot at the back of his head, and finally she switched it off. By this time it was 12:55. She wondered how long it would be before he regained consciousness. It didn't really matter, so long as he thought he had been out a long time. She opened the face of the clock on the wall and turned the hand to 1:20.

She pulled a chair close to Dr. Hussman and sat watching him. When the clock hands pointed to 1:30 she saw his eyelids flutter and switched on the machine. But it was a false alarm, so she switched it off again. Finally, when the clock showed 1:50, he groaned and stirred. Miss Featherstone switched the machine on and watched intently.

He came to slowly. First, his eyes opened: they opened but he didn't seem to see anything. Next, he was looking at her, at first blankly, then with a dawning bewilderment. He lifted his hand vaguely to feel his head and it touched the barrel of the machine behind him. Suspicion and fear came into

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his eyes—but most of all, fear. He turned his head slowly, as though he hardly dared to look. When he saw the machine he tore himself loose, staggered whimpering to the opposite side of the room, and cowered against the wall.

Miss Featherstone watched him with an idiotic smile. The machine had crashed to the floor with the jerk he'd given it in his frenzied effort to get away from it. Even now, he didn't seem to see her. He was staring at the clock.

At last he looked at Miss Featherstone. "Who are you?" he whispered. "Why have you done this to me?"

Miss Featherstone smiled her idiotic smile. "I was only playing doctor and patient," she explained. "Such a nice game! Now I suppose they'll put me away again."

Things happened quickly after that. Dr. Hussman seemed to lose his head entirely. He rushed out into the hall shouting for help, and in a moment the consulting room was crowded with nurses and servants. Soon after that came the police, two of them. Dr. Hussman was still beside himself and could hardly give a coherent account of what had happened, but he had the bruises on his head, and he pointed to the ebony stick.

But Miss Featherstone noticed he gave her in charge for knocking him unconscious. Nothing else was mentioned. He seemed unwilling to call attention to the mechanism on the floor.

Miss Featherstone had never been charged in a police court before, and she found it interesting. The policemen really were very kind. Even the inquisitive man from Scotland Yard was kind. Curious how interested he seemed to be in Dr. Hussman.

Meanwhile Miss Featherstone was in the dock. The magistrate was looking bored and the police were applying for a remand. Somebody mentioned bail, but the police opposed it because, they said, she wasn't responsible for her actions. But now Sir Gilbert was saying he would be responsible for her. The magistrate murmured something inaudible, and presently she was in a taxi alone with Sir Gilbert.

And before she realized it they were in a sunny room in a nursing home, and Sir Gilbert was standing in front of her. "Now, Miss Featherstone," he began, "it's time you told me what all this means."

"I think it's a touch of schizophrenia," Miss Featherstone said calmly.

"Nonsense!" Sir Gilbert was

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impatient. "You're as sane as I am and you know it."

Miss Featherstone gave a derisive snort. "I hope I'm a great deal saner than that!"

He looked at her sourly. Then he tried pleading. "Don't you see this puts me in a very awkward position after what you told me the other day?"

"I don't see why this should have anything to do with what I said the other day," Miss Featherstone replied.

"Are you trying to persuade me that you didn't go to Dr. Hussman because you thought he was mixed up some way in your niece's death?"

"I'm not trying to persuade you of anything. Dr. Hussman has charged me with hitting him over the head with a stick. If I said or did anything more than that to him, it's for him to say, isn't it?"

Sir Gilbert gave up the unequal contest. "Very well, if you won't tell me, you won't; but you're not going to have it all your own way. I'm in charge, and I'm going to order you senna pods and a milk diet."

Miss Featherstone poured the senna pods down the basin. As for the milk diet, she had been intending for some time to go a little slimming, and this was a splendid opportunity.

For the next few days she was being continually asked questions by Sir Gilbert and the detectives and even the Assistant Commissioner himself. She wouldn't tell them a thing. The proper place to tell her story was in court, where she intended to tell it from beginning to end—when Dr. Hussman was there and they could all watch his face.

The one thing she longed to know in the meantime was what Dr. Hussman was doing and thinking. As far as she was concerned, her suspicions had been proved by Dr. Hussman's behavior when he first came to. The terror in his eyes could have meant only one thing: that he thought she had done to him exactly what he had done to Sybil. Further proof had been added when he avoided all mention of the machine.

By now, of course, he would have discovered that he could sleep, that she hadn't done him any real harm; and when he appeared in court he would probably take the line that she was a lunatic. The only danger was that they might all really believe she was crazy.

On the morning of the sixth day Sir Gilbert came in with a grave face. "I've got some serious news for you. Dr. Hussman was found dead in bed this morning."

Miss Featherstone looked at

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him. "You don't mean I hit him as hard as all that?"

"No, I don't. But he hasn't slept for the past six days. Last night he took an overdose of drugs and ended it."

But I can't have killed him, Miss Featherstone was thinking; the machine was only on for a couple of minutes. That can't have been long enough.

"You must tell all you know now," Sir Gilbert went on. "It's your only hope. The Assistant Commissioner will be here any minute. I've come to warn you."

"I suppose you've told him what I said to you that first time?"

"Not yet," Sir Gilbert answered. "But I may have to. So far it's he who has been telling me things. Apparently Sybil wasn't the only one. Two other girls died who were friends of Hussman's. They've known that a long time, only they had no evidence to act on. Now they know about Sybil as well, and they know she was your niece. You must tell the whole truth."

"But what am I supposed to have done?" asked Miss Featherstone.

"You're supposed to have used some apparatus on him—the same apparatus he used on those girls."

"I see. Have they found this apparatus in his consulting room?"

"No. Everything there is standard equipment."

"Well then?"

"There's something missing. It was on the floor when he called the police, but now it's gone."

"H'm! It seems a pity the police didn't look at it while they had a chance. Am I supposed to have spirited it away?"

"No, Hussman did. It could have been used as evidence against him as well as you."

"Had he confessed to its existence?"

"He never mentioned it."

"Too bad!" Miss Featherstone observed dryly. "It looks as though the police haven't got a case at all until they've found this apparatus."

"D'you mean you'll refuse to speak?"

"I can't tell them things I don't know."

"But it's your duty—in the interests of justice and science as well."

"In my opinion," Miss Featherstone said flatly, "justice has already been done. As for science, it is discoveries like this that are ruining mankind. The sooner some machines are lost, the better."

That was the end of her talk with Sir Gilbert. When the

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Assistant Commissioner took his place, she disclaimed any knowledge of the alleged apparatus. She saw that once she spoke about it she'd be in for a charge—not of assault, but of murder. Accordingly she admitted she had assaulted Dr. Hussman because she knew he was the man who had led Sybil astray. She admitted that and nothing else, and three hours of questioning couldn't shake her.

The Assistant Commissioner was studying her closely all this time. A grand woman, he was thinking, and putting up a grand show! Pity she had forgotten all about the diary he had in his pocket. It didn't say enough, that diary; perhaps he could trap her into telling more.

But he really didn't want to do that. Why stir up everything anew when it had already been so neatly settled? Was it his duty to go on demanding victims when the account had already been balanced? He decided it wasn't. The machine had vanished, and without it he didn't have a case.

The Assistant Commissioner stopped suddenly in front of Miss Featherstone. "So you're quite sure you have nothing more to tell me?"

"Quite sure," Miss Featherstone replied.

"Very well, then." He pulled the diary from his pocket and handed it to her. "I was going to ask your permission to read this, but I don't think it's necessary now. Better burn it."

Miss Featherstone felt herself sink into the floor as he left the room. She had completely forgotten the diary, and she was certain he had read every word of it.

When the case finally came up Miss Featherstone was bound over to be on good behavior for twelve months. Sir Gilbert had testified as to her sanity, and the magistrate decided to be lenient.

Sir Gilbert saw her off when she took the train back to Devonshire.

"There's just one more point about sleep," she said.

"Oh! What is that?" Sir Gilbert sounded suspicious.

"Am I right in supposing that shock or anxiety might cause severe insomnia?"

"Perfectly right."

"Then, just to take an instance, suppose someone was obsessed with the idea that he would never sleep again. Could that in itself be enough to keep him from sleeping?"

"Quite enough."

"That's all I want to know," Miss Featherstone ended sweetly. "Goodbye, and thank you."

Sir Gilbert stood gazing where the train had been, long after it was out of sight.

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In her accompanying letter the author wrote: "My new story started out to be a women's liberation ghost story and ended up having nothing to do with either phenomenon."

Now you have exactly the same head start your Editor had . . .

DEJA VU

by MARY BARRETT

Mrs. Oliver was puzzled. She always liked to pay cash, now that she could, and she no longer kept in touch with anyone out of town. Therefore she received almost no mail. The package which the mailman handed her was a surprise, and, like many surprises, unwelcome.

"There must be a mistake," Mrs. Oliver said uncertainly.

"No mistake, lady." And the mailman walked away.

Mrs. Oliver inspected the parcel. It was wrapped in brown paper and sealed with tape. Her name and address were clearly spelled out in neat block letters. The stamps were canceled with the local postmark.

She put the parcel down on the dining table. For some reason she was reluctant to open it. At the edge of awareness, the sensation gnawed at her that she had experienced this same event before. *Deja vu.*

Don't be a fool, Mrs. Oliver said sternly to herself. She hoped that she wasn't getting eccentric, living alone as she had been since John died. Surely a package in the mail was nothing to be so upset about.

She pulled at the sealing tape. Under the paper was a plain white box bearing no identification. Its very impersonality somehow increased Mrs. Oliver's uneasiness.

The box was lined with white tissue paper. Lying in the center, like a cherished treasure, was a little music box with a dainty lady dancer on top.

Mrs. Oliver gasped. She picked up the box. She wound the little key. The lady dancer turned slowly, gracefully, and the music box tinkled *The Blue Danube.*

It was impossible!

Mrs. Oliver sat down. Her hands were suddenly cold and her heart was beating fast.

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It was the very first gift that John had sent to her. It came before they were married, when John was still courting her. The little Bavarian music box had arrived, then as now, in a parcel in the mail. Then, as now, it had been carefully wrapped and sealed. John was always a careful man.

She looked again at the address on the wrapping paper. It told her nothing. The printed words were impersonal, unrevealing.

Panic hit Mrs. Oliver like a sonic boom. She knew very well where she had last seen the music box—in Mr. Stover's store, where she had taken it to be sold.

She stood up shakily and forced herself into action.

"Mr. Stover, I would like to see the Bavarian music box which I sold to you."

Mr. Stover had been afraid of this. How much of the truth could he tell her? He looked at her closely. No, he decided, she was too agitated; even part of the truth would be too great a shock.

"I remember it," he said. "Had a little dancing girl, didn't it? That was sold some time ago."

Mrs. Oliver was uncertain whether to feel relief or apprehension.

"Do you remember who bought it?"

"No. I didn't know the man. He was a stranger who happened in. A young fellow. Didn't quibble about the price."

Mrs. Oliver felt dizzy. That would have been John's style.

"A young man, you said?"

"That's right. In his early thirties, I'd say."

Mrs. Oliver slept restlessly that night. She had distressing dreams from which she woke perspiring, her heart pounding, the thought of her dead husband vivid in her mind.

John. *He* was in his early thirties when they first met. He was handsome and ambitious, already a successful lawyer. It was inevitable that he would become an important man in state politics.

He was a good catch for any woman. And how persuasively he had courted her, showering her with attention and presents!

He had this house built for her, and had it furnished with the finest things. She appreciated all this. There was no passion on her part, but she couldn't, finally, resist him. Her family was an old one, far more distinguished than his; but their money had long ago trickled away. She could not afford not to marry for money. So it

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might as well be John.

If he was ever disappointed he was too gentlemanly to let it show . . .

She hid the music box in a drawer under the linen tablecloths and tried to forget it. It was not that simple. Whoever was manipulating Mrs. Oliver's state of mind was not only very clever but astonishingly well informed.

Only a week after the arrival of the music box another parcel was delivered. It, too, was carefully wrapped and sealed. The box was, again, disquieting in its impersonality.

Mrs. Oliver opened it and felt her knees go weak. Deep in tissue paper the box held the exquisite emerald brooch which John had given her on the day they were married. It was a lovely thing, of superb craftsmanship. Mr. Stover had given her a very good price for it. Now it lay in her hand, as sparkling as it was the day John had pinned it so tenderly on her bridal dress.

Mrs. Oliver tried to slow the beating of her heart. It wasn't good for her to be so upset. The doctor would be cross with her.

If this eerie procedure continued, she would receive many packages. John had been very generous with gifts. His practice brought in a great deal of money. To outside observers she seemed a very lucky woman. She had only to drop the smallest hint and John would buy her whatever she wanted.

Still, as time went by, she had felt more and more like a kept slave. She yearned for a little cash of her own. Not much. Just enough so that she could be free to buy some small things for herself. He never let her have a personal checking or bank account, and he gave her a minimum of pocket money.

"I would rather take care of you myself, dear," he said.

John overlooked nothing. He established charge accounts with the grocery store, the milkman, the dry cleaners. He bought all her clothes himself. In all the days of her marriage she never had more than a five-dollar bill of her own. Of course, John paid all the bills himself . . .

The packages continued to come. Mrs. Oliver lived in a state of constant agitation. The parcels arrived with no regularity, and she never knew on which day one would be delivered. There was, however, one thing she could be certain of ahead of time—the contents of each box. For the presents were coming back to her in the exact order John had given them to her.

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Her birthday present, the diamond bracelet, was followed by the matching earrings John had given her for Christmas.

At first, when she was a new bride, she had been charmed by John's generosity. She had never owned beautiful things before, and the shower of extravagant gifts was like a dream come true. It was only in time that the longing for the illusion of financial independence came to sit on her soul like a lead weight; and in time the longing became an obsession.

John refused even to consider the possibility of her looking for a job.

"We're rich, dear," he said. "It would be ridiculous for you to work. You know that I'll get you anything you want."

As time passed, John's gifts brought her no joy. They seemed merely symbols of her bondage. She even had trouble pretending to be pleased.

Now, receiving them a second time, she felt even less pleasure. She felt only horror and repugnance. As each gift arrived she quickly hid it away.

His anniversary present of silver demitasse spoons came only shortly before the hand-blown crystal vase which John had brought back from a short trip out of town.

Mrs. Oliver's panic was now beginning to overwhelm her. There was only one gift left—the last one John had given her. She knew what it would mean if that one came back. And she knew with dreadful certainty that although it had been, in life, John's last gift, it would not now be. She knew that the final gift would come to her from the grave.

Mrs. Oliver, never a hardy woman, was not well. She hardly ever slept. When, finally, she did drop off, her dreams were terrifying, and she often woke up screaming.

She no longer had any appetite. She had lost so much weight that her dresses hung like bags. She hardly recognized herself in the mirror. Her eyes stared back at her from sunken sockets like glass globes in a skull.

The package came.

John's last gift.

She knew very well what the package contained even before she opened it. He had brought this gift on no special occasion —it had been a sudden whim. He had seen it in a store window and, on impulse, had gone in and bought it for her.

Her hands shook. She could hardly tear off the paper. Inside the white box lay the gift. It was a beautiful little emerald pillbox, made by an expert craftsman. It was truly a work

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of art. Mrs. Oliver put it out of sight as quickly as she could.

She tried to brace herself for what she knew was bound to come next. But what could she do? There was no way to anticipate how it would come, or in what form. There was no way to protect herself.

That night she went to bed early and lay there, wide-awake. Her eyes were open, staring unseen at the ceiling.

There was a knock at the door. It was not imperative—simply firm and sure.

Mrs. Oliver stepped into her bedroom slippers and put on her robe. She went silently down the stairs. She could no more have ignored that self-assured knock than she could have left the packages unopened. She was moved by an irresistible compulsion.

The knock sounded again—no louder than before, but still firm and self-confident.

Mrs. Oliver went to the door. She stood there, dizzy. Her hand was on the doorknob.

She was faint with panic and fatigue. Her body shook, out of control. She sank to the floor and her face pressed against the hard wood of the door.

Again the knock sounded.

There was a pounding in her ears. The hall seemed to tilt, first one way, then another.

"John," she whispered, "how did you know?"

It *was* John on the other side of the door. She was certain of that. And somehow he had learned the truth.

She had taken the poison out of the little enamel pillbox. She had put it in his demitasse. She was sure he hadn't seen her do it. She had sat there calmly and watched him drink the coffee, and die. And, finally, she had money of her own.

She should have known better, she thought fuzzily. She should have known she couldn't outwit John, that he would never stop giving her things.

She lay, a crumpled disorderly heap, on the floor of the hall. She was shrunken and unadorned. She looked old. She sighed, a long sigh, and then she died.

There was a final knock on the door, and then the sound of footsteps going away.

Mr. Stover was disappointed. He had waited until he had sent back all her lovely things, in the same order she had sold them, to tell her he loved her. Well, he would call again tomorrow.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Let there be no iron rule; let the approach vary as seems best.

This month, with your permission, I would pay belated tribute to that English writer who, though a master of mystery, has left behind him (so far as this country is concerned, at least) no work now available in paperback. If I must send you to second-hand bookshops in search of some novel he wrote, almost any novel he wrote, that's better than letting you miss them. Probably you won't mind; being devoted to blood and thunder, you may even relish the search.

Anthony Berkeley Cox, born 1893, died in December of 1970. So far forgot may be auld acquaintance that I did not learn of his passing until fifteen months later. Therefore this appreciation must contain not only tribute but apology.

Tony, as we called him, founded the London Detection Club. Misled by some confusion whose source can't be traced, several sound critics have stated that he founded it in 1928. Though he may have conceived the idea in that year, the club was not actually organized until 1932. This fact appeared in the brochure they once distributed to new members, together with Tony's official title of First Freeman.

"Now what," friends often asked, "does First Freeman mean?" Once, to avert a threatened rumpus, Peacemaker John Rhode swore it meant the right to attend all committee meetings and vote at them. Anyway, that's what Tony always did; his title had to mean *something*. But, since other charter members had been R. Austin Freeman and Freeman Wills Crofts, a simpler explanation may be found in his own impassioned avowal.

"With Freemans to the right, Freemans to the left, Freemans on every side," he had declared, "the founder of this club is damn well going to be First Freeman, and don't you forget it!"

Lucky fellow, Tony. Of well-to-do family, with an independent income, he had no need to struggle in the marketplace. Turning to detective stories because he so much enjoyed them, in 1924 he

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wrote *The Layton Court Mystery* as Anthony Berkeley.

Then came a distinguished series, his sleuths Roger Sheringham and milquetoast Ambrose Chitterwick: each novel of dazzling ingenuity, each with a twist or double-twist to yank the rug from under us at the end. As the world's best practitioner Anthony Berkeley (Great Britain) shared equal honors, as he still shares them, with the editor-in-chief of this magazine (U.S.A.).

As early as '31 he had opened a new door. In *Malice Aforethought*, calling himself Francis Iles, he studied the mind of a homicidal country doctor. "Murder without mystery," his publisher rather triumphantly cried. With *Before the Fact*, which followed, we met a young man of such charm and callousness as to be the death of any person who got in Johnnie Aysgarth's way.

Among aesthetes, who shudder at detective fiction, it has become the fashion to praise these "psychological" studies for superior characterization, and to exalt Francis Iles as though Anthony Berkeley had never existed. The true reason they say this lies deeper. Having no ingenuity of their own, they resent ingenuity in others and bitterly decry it as they decry the element of surprise.

Much though I admire Tony's work as Iles, give me Berkeley every time! Give me murder *with* mystery, characters no less vivid for wearing masks; give me the sensational case, the fair but cryptic evidence building towards some thunderbolt disclosure.

Certain Berkeley books you must read. Find *Trial and Error*, that ironic tragi-comedy. Find *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*, multiple solutions in one. Find *The Piccadilly Murder* (how to commit your crime in public); find *The Silk Stocking Murders* (mad strangler of women); find *Dead Mrs. Stratton* or my own particular favorite, *Top-Storey Murder*.

Those nineteen thirties were the Detection Club's golden years. Tony, its First Freeman, remained a moving spirit. Then, with abrupt effect, the storyteller shut up shop.

Following *As for the Woman* . . . in September '39, both Iles and Berkeley fell silent. He wrote that last book, Tony told me long afterwards, under a severe emotional strain; appearing as war was declared, the book fell flat. It had finished him, he insisted, and couldn't be persuaded otherwise.

A great pity, though. Some of us mystery mongers, continuing to ply our trade, merely grow old. Tony, who downed tools too soon, deserves to become immortal.

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a *NEW* Sergeant Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

It befell Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to parachute into the jungle of Mandalasia to rescue the great missionary doctor, humanitarian, and accordion player, Dr. Angus Macpherson But there were complications: General Lo Ding Dok's government forces were creeping up from the South; Yem Seng's Communist rebels were slinking down from the North, deposed Prince Cham Pang's Neutralists were sidling in from the West. And there were spies—a Red Chinese agent, a C.I.A. man . . .

Bullock is one of the very few comic detectives extant. Relish this sly tale of a mysterious hammock lacer, of attempted homicide, and of international politics, with as shrewd a plot as has ever been satire-coated and sugar-coated with humor . . .

THE MANDALASIAN GAROTTE

by JAMES POWELL

The Minister of Justice admired his own handwriting, the way his plump jade fountain pen tied its clever knots, loops, and hitches. "Legal" was among his favorite words. He liked the way the "l's" went up and the "g" went down. He was writing it when his secretary ushered in Commissioner Baines of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

"Kind of you to come, Commissioner," he said, without raising his eyes. "Please sit down. Be with you in a minute." Yes, he liked "legal" and secretly attributed his having been given the portfolio of Justice to the fact that he wrote it with such a flourish.

Commissioner Baines tried unsuccessfully to clear his throat. "May I ask how the

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Prime Minister is, sir?" he said hoarsely.

"As well as might be expected," replied the Minister of Justice, crossing some "t's" and dotting some "i's." "By the by, what was his name again? Your man who slammed the limousine door on the Prime Minister's hand."

"Bullock, sir," said Baines. "Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock."

"Well, no matter. That wasn't what I wanted to see you about." The Minister of Justice put the cap on his pen and looked up. "Tell me what you know about Dr. Angus Macpherson."

Baines exhaled and settled back a bit in his chair. "The Johnny Appleseed of Canadian missionary medicine? Let's see. Twenty years of building little hospitals all over Southeast Asia. Finances his work by giving accordion concert tours to standing-room-only audiences. After the last tour he rode a bicycle into the jungle of Mandalasia and hasn't been heard of since."

"Correct," said the Minister of Justice. "Now as you know, the civil war in Mandalasia has stalemated. In spite of considerable American and Communist bloc backing, neither the government forces nor the Communist rebels are getting anywhere. We have reason to believe that each side would like to tip the balance and sway international sentiment in its favor by producing Macpherson's dead body and accusing the other side of having done the dirty deed." He paused. "Speaking of dirty deed, your man—"

"Bullock, sir," said Baines. "Bullock really did a job on the Prime Minister. I heard the bones go crunch twenty yards away." The Minister of Justice shuddered. "But back to Macpherson. It seems the Americans have an additional reason for wanting Macpherson dead. They've discovered he doesn't charge his patients for his services." Seeing Baines's puzzlement the Minister of Justice explained. "To the Americans that's socialized medicine. And you and I know what Americans *think* of socialized medicine. The situation is further complicated by Macpherson's steadfast refusal to play at Peking's International Festival of Young Communist Accordion Artists. Chairman Mao, deciding to take this as a personal affront, has recently placed the whole matter in the hands of his crack assassin group, the What-do-you-call-thems."

"Not the Sly Dragons, sir?" asked a horrified Baines.

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The Minister of Justice nodded. "But the worst is yet to come," he said. "It seems our friends in the Opposition have gotten wind of the situation. Any day now the Prime Minister can expect a question in the House: What is the government doing to guarantee Macpherson's safety? The thing has the potential of a red-hot election issue.

"Well, late last night the Prime Minister—the pain from his hand kept him up until the wee hours—hit upon another of those wonderful, no-nonsense plans of his: we drop one of your men into the jungle. He finds Macpherson and leads him across the border to safety in Bengalia."

"But, sir," protested Baines, "there's hundreds of square miles of jungle. There's no way my man could find Macpherson."

"Commissioner," explained the Minister of Justice, slowly and patiently, "in a situation like this it isn't necessary that we succeed, only that we try. So the Prime Minister can assure the House that steps are being taken on Macpherson's behalf."

Glancing to the right and to the left, Baines leaned forward and whispered, "Sir, we'd be sending my man to certain death."

"Then I'd advise you to send someone you can spare. I assume you have a man in mind, Commissioner."

"Yes, sir," said Baines weakly.

"Good," beamed the Minister of Justice. "Good. Then tell your man that Canada is counting on him, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. In fact," he smiled, "as a measure of the importance of this mission the Prime Minister's only regret is that a severe disability in one hand prevents him from packing your man's parachute personally."

Halfway through "A Carnival of Venice" Dr. Angus Macpherson's fingers stalled on the keyboard of his mother-of-pearl accordion. Resting the instrument on the veranda railing he scowled from beneath bushy eyebrows at the ragged mark the jungle made against the sky. For several days now the clearing and the buildings of the modest hospital complex, once a source of quiet satisfaction, had been closing in about him like a noose.

First had come the rumors of armies converging on the spot, and overnight what few old men were left had vanished into the jungle. Then Tang, the little Chinese, had arrived, standing in the bow of the small

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sampan, wearing an inscrutable smile which had not faltered until the shifting current carried him past the boat landing and around the bend toward the white-water rapids. Macpherson's sigh of relief had proved premature. The next day some down-river villagers had trundled the battered and unconscious Tang back to the hospital.

That same evening a bearded, hawk-nosed man in a torn safari jacket and pith helmet with a leopard-skin sweatband had crashed out of the jungle raving theatrically (until he fell, with a cry of genuine surprise, into the excavation for the new root cellar). He was Michael Patrick Finn, a field engineer for Shamrock Diamond Mines, an Irish company. Or so his papers said.

Macpherson nodded decisively. Yes, it was time to move on. Somewhere out there in the darkness he would start another hospital, another footstep in his flight from civilization.

There was a commotion of voices at the edge of the clearing. Four old women came into the moonlight. They were carrying someone on a litter. When they reached him Macpherson saw the broad-brimmed hat, the trim mustache, and the scarlet tunic beneath the torn jump suit. As he felt the man's pulse, eyelids fluttered. Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock struggled up on one elbow. His mouth moved.

"Dr. Macpherson, I presume," he said in a weak but triumphant voice, then fell back unconscious.

Oh, lordy, lordy, thought Macpherson, wishing for the thousandth time that week that he had become a lighthouse keeper like his father before him.

Bullock awoke with a roaring ache in his jaw and a monumental stiff neck. During the first tree-top hour hanging upside down in a tangle of parachute his small change and car keys had trickled away into the darkness, followed in short order by his wallet and pistol and the lanyard from around his neck.

But fear—real fear—had not seized him until the survival kit started its inching creep down his body. Without its carefully chosen contents—the sum of his 20 years on the Force—Bullock was just another man against the wilderness. Snapping desperately, he had caught the last strap between his teeth. How long had he remained like that until the old women found him? One day? Two? No matter. Here he was. And there, hanging at the foot of the bed

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was the survival kit. His luck had seen him through again.

Someone giggled. Bullock's eyes became cautious slits. A small Chinese was sitting up in the bed next to his. His right arm was in a shoulder cast that curved out in front as though he was dancing with an invisible partner. He was reading from a little red book. As Bullock watched he giggled again and underlined a passage with a pencil stub.

"My name is Tang, in case you're wondering, Mountie," he said. Bullock stiffened and squeezed his eyes shut. "Relax," coaxed Tang. "I'm Nationalist Chinese, a loyal lackey of the bourgeois imperialists just like you."

Sensing the jig was up, Bullock opened his eyes. "A bit far from home, aren't you, Mr. Tang?" he asked suspiciously.

"I have the honor of being a troubleshooter for the Taiwan Tract and Gospel Society, a group not unlike your Gideons," Tang explained, holding up his little red book. "Our aim is to place our tracts in every hotel room in Southeast Asia. I mistook the good doctor's hospital for a resort hotel."

Their voices woke the big-nosed man in the bed on Bullock's other side. He wore a shoulder cast identical to Tang's except that it was on the left arm (his invisible partner seemed to have the lead). "Faith and begorra, Michael Patrick Finn's the name," he insisted, shaking Bullock's hand. "Sure, 'tis out like a light you've been for two whole days, me boyo."

Bullock narrowed his eyes. "I'll bet you're Irish, Mr. Finn," he said.

Finn agreed. "Wasn't it lost in the jungle I was and looking for diamonds and didn't I wander into this clearing by accident now?"

An extraordinarily beautiful woman in a crisp white smock strode briskly into the room. Her jet-black hair framed delicate ivory features. Her eyes suggested the Orient. "Begorra!" shouted Finn. "I'll take me shillelagh to any blatherskite that won't admit that Dr. Lotus Lane is the prettiest colleen in the whole wide world. Look, I've made the beauty blush." But Lotus Lane wasn't blushing. She thrust a thermometer into Finn's mouth.

Tang giggled. "Ah, Lotus, is it not written somewhere that when a plum blossom falls into a pond it is the ugly frog that croaks first, not the one that loves the most? I have composed a poem on that theme which—" A second thermometer cut him short.

Lotus Lane took Bullock's

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wrist and felt his pulse. "Your leg giving you any trouble?" she asked.

Bullock looked down and discovered that one of his legs was in a fat cast below the knee. Immediately it began to itch. "Nothing I can't handle," he said through clenched teeth. "Just tell Dr. Macpherson that Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would like to speak to him as one Canadian to another on a matter of national—" Lotus Lane popped the last of her thermometers into his mouth with an exasperated little sigh.

"The doctor's a very busy man," she said flatly. "So would you be with the government forces under General Lo Ding Dok creeping up from the South, with Yem Seng and his Communist rebels slinking down from the North, with Neutralists under deposed Prince Cham Pang sidling in from the West. By tomorrow we should hear the guns. I really doubt if the doctor can spare you any time."

She collected the thermometers and left without reading them. Tang scurried after her, reciting a poem entitled, "Plum Blossoms in the Sunset Far Out on the Frog Pond."

Finn flipped a cigarette in the air and caught it between his teeth. "Don't let that heathen Chinee fool you, me bucko," he warned, striking a match with his thumbnail. "Taiwan Tract and Gospel Society, my Aunt Fanny. Yesterday, scouting around for the Coke machine, I overheard him bragging to Dr. Lane that he was some kind of a Red Chinese agent. He was begging her to run off with him when his job here was done. As if a classy doll like her would spend her life making pig iron in the back yard with a runt like him." Bullock noticed that Finn had lost his brogue. So did Finn. "Begorra," he added half-heartedly.

Dr. Macpherson came into the room, shooing Tang ahead of him. "Yesterday I explained why you must remain in your room, Mr. Tang," the doctor was saying. "I could lock you in, you know."

"Love laughs at locksmiths," insisted Tang, crawling back into bed.

Macpherson scowled at Bullock. "Well, Acting Whatever-it-is Whoever-you-are, what did you want to see me about?"

"I'd prefer to speak to you alone, Doctor," said Bullock.

Macpherson shrugged, filled a hypodermic needle, then deftly put first Tang and then Finn to sleep. He came at

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Bullock with a thermometer.

"Dr. Lane just took my temperature," protested Bullock.

"Her thermometer's centigrade. Mine's Fahrenheit," muttered Macpherson, slipping home the glass tube. "Hope you're fit to travel," he said after a moment. "When somebody tries to do me in by lacing my string hammock with wet rawhide, it's time for me to move on."

Bullock's noise sounded like "Good Godfrey."

"Yes," insisted Macpherson, obviously pleased by the reaction. "Yesterday I was taking my afternoon nap on the veranda as is my wont. I awoke to find myself immobile, my arms pinned to my sides, gasping for breath, and on the threshold of acute pain. Someone had laced my hammock with wet rawhide. As it dried, the rawhide contracted. I was caught in an ever-tightening cocoon of death.

"Does that shock you? Well, frankly, after twenty years devoted to the service of my fellow man I have no illusions about him at all. The more I see of him with his converging armies and wet rawhide the less I like him." Macpherson's eyes took on a far-away glaze. "Some day I hope to build a hospital so deep in the jungle that no one will ever find it. And shouldn't that be every humanitarian doctor's dream—not to have any patients?"

Bullock tore out the thermometer. "The ever-tightening cocoon of death!" he shouted.

"Ah, yes," said Macpherson. "Well, the rawhide grew tighter and tighter. Without losing my sang froid I started the hammock swinging, timing the swings to intersect with the blades of the small oscillating fan I kept on a nearby table. At first the hammock strings withstood the blades. Then they frayed. Finally they broke and I dropped out the bottom to safety."

"Fantastic," said Bullock. Wait till the barracks started talking about close calls and he hit them with that one!

"Strangely enough," mused Macpherson, "lacing a man's string hammock with wet rawhide is a traditional way of disposing of tyrants in these parts. The Mandalasian Garotte, they call it."

"Well, from here on in your worries are over, Doctor," said Bullock. "I've orders to get you across the border safe and sound."

"All right," said Macpherson. "I've clearly worn out my welcome in Mandalasia. And I can unload you and those two other pieces of excess baggage,

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Mr. Tang and Mr. Finn, at the border. Now get some rest. I want you fit to travel in the morning."

"Yours truly has the constitution of an ox," laughed Bullock. "Ask Kingston Billy Wainwright and his gang of counterfeiters about that time they tricked me into handcuffing myself to their backwoods printing press, little thinking I'd drag it sixteen miles to my motel and my spare set of keys." Bullock put his wrists together proudly. "See, the right one is an inch longer than—" Macpherson gave a bored yawn and the briefest of apologetic smiles. Bullock didn't even see the hypodermic coming.

Centuries before, kings and potentates and pilgrims from all over Southeast Asia had taken the Holy Road to the sacred temple city of Batong Wat. Today the jungle has reclaimed the city. And all that remains of the Holy Road is an overgrown path and stretches of heaving cobblestones marked at intervals of roughly a day's march by small temples intended in ages past for the traveler's spiritual refreshment.

Macpherson headed the column, machete in one hand, accordion strapped to his back. Bullock hobbled along behind him on crutches and in full Mountie uniform. He had even browned his cast with polish from his survival kit to match his boot. Next came Tang and then Finn. In a brief cast-butting tussle Tang had won Lotus Lane's make-up kit to carry; Finn, her medical bag. She brought up the rear, looking cool, beautiful, and unattainable.

As Bullock saw his job, he had to protect Macpherson not only from any hostile soldiers they might encounter but also from the mysterious hammock lacer as well. Unless apprehended, would-be murderers invariably tried again. Was Tang the culprit? Was the little Chinese really a Red agent? And what about Finn? Something about the Irishman didn't quite jell. And last but not least there was Lotus Lane.

"Dr. Lane?" said Macpherson. "She's been with me for three years. A most satisfactory assistant. A graduate of the school of hard knocks, her contempt for her fellow man is second only to my own."

Bullock began his investigation by slowing his pace until he was abreast of Tang. "Mr. Tang," he said, using his official voice, "where were you at the time of the murder attempt?"

"This is not Canada, Bullock," said the little man.

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"Your monkey suit and funny hat mean nothing here. But as a token of good faith I will tell you." He smiled inscrutably. "I was with the beautiful Lotus."

"I can check that, you know," said Bullock, deciding to let the crack about his uniform pass.

"Then why would I lie?" smiled Tang. "That leaves only one unaccounted for, doesn't it? Our Mr. Finn, the phony Irishman. One overhears things. That his name is really Birch Bier and that he's with the C.I.A. He urged Lotus Lane to run away with him after a certain 'hit' had been made. He wants them to grill hamburgers together on some New Jersey patio." Tang quickened his pace and moved ahead.

Bullock remained deep in thought until a voice at his elbow said, "Faith and begorra, me bucko."

"Drop the Irish bit, Mr. Birch Bier of the C.I.A.," said Bullock severely. "Just where were you at the time of the murder attempt?"

Bier was poking at an itch under his cast with a thin stick. He gave Bullock a wink and a nudge. "Kiss and Tell isn't my style, but if it's any of your business I was with Lotus Lane. Ask her if you don't believe me. All right, so I'm here to kill Macpherson. But sneaky stuff like that hammock bit isn't my way. In fact, I'll tell you what I'll do, Maynard," he said, offering his hand; "you keep out of my hair and I'll make them think his death was an accident so you won't look bad. But just remember the C.I.A. motto: 'We always get our man.' "

Bullock turned purple. "Now you listen here," he said through clenched teeth, " 'We always get our man' is the Mountie motto. Good Godfrey, you people have"—he ticked the items off on his fingers—"expense accounts, fancy electronic gear, fat movie parts. At least let us have our—" Bullock stopped dead and looked skyward. "Listen to the birds," he whispered.

Bier listened. "I don't hear any birds," he said.

"Precisely," said Bullock triumphantly.

Up ahead, Macpherson was signaling them into the bushes. Bullock squatted down behind a particularly unCanadian-looking fern and hoped they hadn't run into the Neutralists. Macpherson had filled him in on them. "The Neutralists are down on anything foreign," he had said. "They rove the countryside smashing transistor radios, making *Time-Life* correspondents eat their ballpoint pens, and burning Marx and

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Engels in tandem effigy. They've sworn to kill me because I won't make house calls." For a humanitarian, Macpherson sure knew how to make enemies. If it was the Neutralists their goose was cooked.

There were voices and the sounds of leather and metal on the trail. Seeing Tang and Bier straining to identify the politics of the approaching column, it came to Bullock in a sudden desperate moment that he and Macpherson were just as dead if it was the government forces or the Communist rebels.

Just then from around the bend came heads wearing American-type helmets. Government troops. Bier started to spring but Tang's looping right, cast and all, thudded squarely against his temple. Bier's cry of joy died on his lips and he fell softly to the ground. The patrol reached them and a moment later passed by.

They rested. Bier sat up, holding his head in his hands. Tang was trying to scratch by rubbing his cast against a tree.

"Mr. Tang," scolded Bullock, "in the West we don't strike a man when he isn't looking. We warn him. We say, 'Put up your dukes.'"

"Shush!" hissed Macpherson. More voices on the trail. Everyone took cover again. This time the heads that came into sight were conical wicker hats. The Communist rebels. Bier threw a blind roundhouse swing. The cast caught Tang behind the ear. The rebel column passed by.

"Mr. Bier," said Bullock reproachfully, "doesn't anyone say, 'Put up your dukes' any more?"

Their progress for the rest of the day was slow and bloody. Three more near-encounters with government patrols cost Bier a tooth, a split lip, and a lump on the back of the head. Rebel patrols left their mark on Tang: a puffy eye, a fat ear, and a nose that bled like a faucet. As dusk gathered between the trees they camped for the night at a small temple beside the trail.

Dinner was a hearty meal concocted by Lotus Lane from water and a can of dehydrated food. Only Bullock refused to partake. "Brought my own," he said proudly, producing a gray-brown lump. "Pemmican," he explained. "Equal parts of rendered fat and dried buffalo meat, plus certain herbs and spices I'm not at liberty to reveal, and a healthy handful of Saskatoon berries." Bullock hacked off a leathery strip and chewed at it. But his enthusiasm was forced. It must

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have been a bad year for Saskatoon berries.

Tang and Bier cleaned their plates quickly and dragged themselves like birds with broken wings to opposite corners where they fell into the sleep of sheer exhaustion. "We should all get some rest," said Macpherson. "Tomorrow we'll reach the Kinkong River valley, a swampy disease-infested no-man's-land that Mandalasia claims is Bengalia's and Bengalia insists belongs to Mandalasia."

Lotus Lane decided to get some fresh air before she turned in. Bullock hobbled out after her. He found her leaning against a tree, deep in thought, her face beautiful in the moonlight. At that moment, as if to add to the scene, from inside the temple Dr. Macpherson's accordion struck up "Nola."

Bullock knew he had a way with women. True, the uniform always worked its magic. But he could turn on the old charm, too, whenever he needed it. Bullock flashed a big smile and wagged his finger. "I should be very, very angry with you, Dr. Lane," he said. "It wasn't very nice not telling me that Tang was a Red Chinese agent and Bier was C.I.A. and that they're both here to kill Dr. Macpherson."

"Men tell beautiful women many things," said Lotus Lane.

"Just the same," said Bullock playfully, "you'd just better come clean and tell me where your own political loyalties lie."

Her eyes flashed in the moonlight. "My father was an American sailor. He abandoned my Mandalasian mother six months before I was born. When her father, a local Communist leader, learned her lover's nationality he drove us from the house at the height of the monsoon season. Dying of pneumonia, my mother left me on the doorstep of an orphanage run by the Neutralists where I was brought up to respect the Mandalasian life of yore when wives could be bought and sold for two goats and a chicken.

"For supper they fed us a thin rice gruel from a large copper kettle. One night I took my little bowl and walked right up and said, 'Please, may I have more?' Punished, I fled to the city where I fell in with a gang of Chinese thieves and pickpockets. I lived as one of them, sleeping with a loaded pistol under my pillow to protect my honor and my share of the booty until I had money enough to sail away to medical school in Switzerland. And here I am. As for my political loyalties, you tell me."

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Bullock was taken aback by her outburst. He cleared his throat. "Let's just put you down as uncommitted. Next question: where were you at the time of the murder attempt?"

"I was alone in my room all afternoon," she said.

Bullock scratched his jaw. "Sure you won't like to reconsider that?" he asked. "You see, if you were with, say, Bier that afternoon, then Tang would be the suspect. And vice versa. On the other hand, if you were alone, then we've got three suspects: Tang, Bier, and you. Take it from me, these cases go a lot smoother if you only have one suspect."

"Sorry," said Lotus Lane. "Neither of those gentlemen has ever set foot in my room."

Bullock chewed on his lip and watched her walk back toward the temple. Obviously Tang and Bier were trying to point the finger of guilt at each other. But what made them think Dr. Lane would go along with their stories? Macpherson struck up "Canadian Sunset."

Homesickness was a lump in Bullock's throat and an ache in his stomach. He wished he was sitting at his own kitchen table across from good old Mavis, his wife. He'd fill up his big teacup and talk things out with her. Yes, a cup of tea and a sandwich or two would go down pretty good right now. Bullock hobbled back to the temple. Before turning in, he'd try the pemmican again.

The morning trail was damp and knee-deep in mist. A weary-eyed Macpherson led the way. "I get these nightmares, Bullock," he admitted. "The population explosion. People cheek to jowl everywhere you turn."

"This may sound strange coming from a Mountie," said Bullock. "But I like people."

They were making good progress. To insure that it continue, Bullock selected a stout stick. When they met their first patrol he squatted down in the bushes between Tang and Bier and tapped the big stick in his palm. They got the message.

But Bullock's main preoccupation was the murder attempt. As he hobbled along he tried to re-enact the crime in his mind, imagining himself first as the little Chinese slinking out of the narrow shadows and up onto the veranda, eyes darting like evil almonds, rawhide dripping between his teeth—Bullock shook his head.

He tried again, imagining himself to be the big-nosed American. But it still didn't work. He tossed his imaginary

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tangle of string hammock and rawhide aside in disgust. There was just no way a man could lace a string hammock with wet rawhide using only one hand.

Then was it Lotus Lane? Bullock shook his head again. *Pretty Mary Lacks Vitamins.* That summer Bullock had wangled permission to attend a Mountie seminar: "Murder: Did You Ever Ask Yourself Why?" given by Dr. Montague Dabkin. The celebrated criminologist had insisted that murder motives have remained unchanged since time immemorial: Politics, Money, Love, Vengeance. To help them remember, Dabkin had given a mnemonic sentence: *Pretty Mary Lacks Vitamins.* Well, Politics was out. And you don't go into the medical missionary line if you're interested in Money. Love? Macpherson was hardly God's gift to women. And Dr. Lane had more motive for Vengeance against others than against a harmless Canadian doctor.

Macpherson broke into Bullock's thoughts. He signaled everyone to take cover. They squatted down in the bushes and scanned the trail. Who would it be this time? Bullock had taken his place between Tang and Bier. He wagged his stick meanacingly. Then he frowned. The first hat that appeared on the trail was broad-brimmed like his own. Other hats followed. A patrol of Mounties? Bullock grinned. A patrol of Mounties to the rescue!

"Put up your dukes," said Tang and Bier simultaneously. Both sides of Bullock's head burst into pain, then darkness rushed in on him.

Bullock's eyes ached when he cracked them open to the late afternoon sun. He was following Macpherson and the others in a makeshift litter carried by four boys in broad-brimmed hats, plaid neckerchiefs, shorts, and woolen knee socks. A middle-aged Mandalasian, similarly dressed but wearing a whistle, was fanning him with a frond. Boy Scouts. "Good Godfrey," said Bullock dejectedly. The litter hit the ground with bone-shattering force.

The man with the whistle leaned over Bullock. "Ah, sir, you must excuse the boys," he said. "You see, 'good Godfrey' bears a striking phonetical similarity to the Mandalasian for 'Put me down this instant or I shall be displeased with you.' This strange coincidence I have puzzled over more than once."

He offered Bullock his hand. "Bay Den Pol, at your service," he said. "The boys and I are on

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our way to the Boy Scout Jamboree in Rangoon." In a half whisper he added, "Would you mind returning the boys' salute? They think you are the Scoutmaster General."

Bullock snapped off a quick salute. The boys proudly hoisted the litter and started down the trail again. At the next high point of land Bay Den Pol said, "Look, the Kinkong valley. On the other side is the border."

"Listen," said Bullock, "no offense meant, but I've got some top-level police work to finish up. I'd like to put my thinking cap on, okay?" Bullock folded his arms, furrowed his brow, and settled back in the litter. There would be Embassy people at the border. They'd demand the culprit's name and expect more from a Mountie than a feeble, "Search me." He reviewed his thinking from re-enactment of crime to *Pretty Mary Lacks Vitamins* and found his logic flawless. If that wasn't bad enough, his leg developed a fierce itch.

"I understand you were set upon by the American and the Chinese gentleman simultaneously," said Bay Den Pol when it was obvious that Bullock had doffed his thinking cap. "That reminds me of the old Mandalasian folktale of how Krog the Crow and Lopti the Stork, though Natural Enemies, Joined Forces to Steal the Tail of Chee-Chee the Peacock. Have you heard that one?"

Bullock scowled as though he had more important things on his mind. But he listened. He could never resist a good story.

"Well, it came about this way," said Bay Den Pol. "Each afternoon Chee-Chee the Peacock, resplendent in his magnificent tail and yellow kid gloves, would strut through the forest catching the hearts of the ladies. His amorous successes set the green worm of envy gnawing deep in the vitals of Krog the Crow and Lopti the Stork. From the cornfield Krog would mutter, 'Fancy Dan.' From the frog pond Lopti would sneer, 'Dude.' And each resolved to steal the magnificent tail for himself.

"Now one stormy night as Lopti peered in through the transom of Chee-Chee's fashionable *pied-a-terre*, who should arrive to peek in at the letter slot but Krog. Now Krog and Lopti were natural enemies. After all, the one was black, the other white. The one squat, the other tall. The one had a short beak, the other a long. Yet together they watched as Chee-Chee banked the fire and bolted the door. Then he locked his tail inside a stout clothes press, placed the key

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between the mattress and the box springs of his bed, blew out the candle, and retired.

"The stork, thinking how he could not gain entrance through the sooty chimney without pointing the finger of guilt at himself, sighed. The crow, thinking the key was tucked far out of reach, sighed. As one man they looked at each other and sealed the bargain with a wink. In a twinkling the crow flew down the chimney and unbolted the door. Then, thanks to his long beak, the stork plucked the key from its hiding place. The two divided up the elegant plumage and went their separate ways."

They were down on the mud flats now, the litter boys wading knee-deep in soft ooze. Macpherson and the others had crossed a shrunken river channel and reached a ruined temple on a rise of land.

"Noo Noo, my wise old peasant nurse, always delighted in the moral of this story," said Bay Den Pol, struggling along beside the litter. " 'Bay Bay,' she would say, 'politics makes strange bedfellows.' "

"Good Godfrey!" exclaimed Bullock.

It was almost dark. Bullock stood on one leg in a backwater pool and washed the mud from his uniform as best he could. Bay Den Pol and his Boy Scouts had marched on ahead, promising to call the Canadian Embassy from the first telephone booth across the border. Bullock wanted to look presentable for the press photographers when they arrived.

Well, another case was as good as closed. He imagined the Prime Minister's surprise at finding him at his old post, guarding the flowerbeds in front of the Parliament Buildings. ("Back so soon, Bullock?" "Mission accomplished, Mr. Prime Minister." "You're a wonder, Bullock. We've got our eye on you." "Thank you, sir. Here, let me get that car door—") With a smile on his face Bullock hobbled back to the temple, stopping only to cut and strip a pole from a nearby stand of bamboo.

His four companions were having after-dinner coffee around a masked fire—tire-tread sandal prints had suggested that Neutralists were in the vicinity. Bullock noted at once that someone had been into his survival kit. If they'd wanted some pemmican, he thought peevishly, all they had to do was ask.

Well, no matter. He took out a small Canadian flag and tied it to the pole. Then, as the others watched with mild interest, he stuck the pole in the ground,

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saluted the flag, and announced, "I claim this no-man's-land for the Dominion of Canada." Accepting a cup of coffee from Lotus Lane with a polite nod, Bullock continued, "And now that this is officially Canadian soil, I arrest you, Tang, and you, Birch Bier, alias Michael Patrick Finn, for attempted murder."

Tang and Bier groaned. "Yes," insisted Bullock, "it took *two* good hands to lace up Dr. Macpherson's hammock. Your right hand, Bier, and your left, Tang. Like Krog the Crow and Lopti the Stork, though natural enemies, you joined forces to steal the tail of Chee-Chee the Peacock."

Bullock really had their attention now. "But why you two? Why not Dr. Lane?

I'll tell you why," continued Bullock. "If I've learned one thing from my years on the Force it's that your woman murderer never laces her victims up in cocoons of death."

At that moment, Bier, who had been fighting to keep his eyes open, gave up the battle and slumped over, breathing deeply. Tang also lost interest.

"No," yawned Bullock, "when my lady turns to murder you can bet she'll choose a gentler way, something that goes with her natural role as a homemaker. Like poison." Bullock's cup clattered to the floor.

"Eh?" said Macpherson groggily. "What was that? Must have dozed off."

Bullock swayed and tried to work his tongue.

Lotus Lane's laughter was silver. She stood up, her arms crossed over her beautiful bosom. "You men," she laughed, "what pompous Romeos, arrogant fools, and posturing ninnies you are! 'Her natural role as a homemaker,' indeed. For your information, Bullock, I was the one who tried the Mandalasian garotte. I had intended the armies to kill Macpherson. But I was afraid that with your help he might escape them."

Lotus smiled and shook her head. "Tang and Bier weren't trying to give themselves alibis for that afternoon. Each wanted to give me one. Why? Each thought I had tried to murder Macpherson out of love—because I was so impatient to run off with him." She was laughing helplessly.

"But you don't understand," explained Bullock thickly. "You haven't got a motive."

"Motive?" said Lotus Lane. "*Sic semper tyrannis.* I hate all men everywhere because of their suppression of women from the beginning of time."

Suddenly it was all clear. "I

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really believe you Women's Lib people have got a point," said Bullock. "And I speak for good old Mavis, my wife, when I say that. But why take it out on Dr. Macpherson?"

Lotus Lane uncrossed her arms and revealed the flare gun from Bullock's survival kit. She pointed it skyward, through a gaping hole in the roof. "This will bring the Neutralists on the double. They'll find you here sleeping like babies and kill you all, blaming Macpherson's death on 'foreign interventionists,' their idiotic—but conveniently vague—male catch-phrase of the moment. Tomorrow Denmark, India, Rumania, and the other countries that venerate Macpherson as a great humanitarian will condemn the Americans, the Russians, or the Red Chinese—or all three—for the ghastly act. The day after tomorrow Japan, Chile, Albania, and the other countries that venerate Macpherson for his accordion wizardry will blame his death on ideology, on Capitalism or Communism—or both. A week from now the world will be one immense battlefield. Then, when the smoke of battle clears and there are no more soldiers left to die, it will be an immense no-man's-land."

"Hear, hear," said Macpherson approvingly and pitched forward into a deep sleep.

"Then after a bit the world will fill up with womanly gardenlike things again," continued Lotus Lane. "Grass to overgrow the iron things of war; flowers instead of shot and shell; song birds instead of bugles—"

"But without men you'd all die out," Bullock insisted.

Lotus Lane gave him a pitying smile. "Thanks to science we don't even need you for that any more."

Bullock shuddered like a tree that feels the woodman's ax. He swayed on his crutches.

"Pleasant dreams, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," said Lotus Lane, knowing he would instinctively come to attention and throw his shoulders back. The crutches slipped out of his armpits and clattered to the temple floor. Bullock fell over backward, noting before sleep took him that the moonlit hole through which she was pointing the flare gun was shaped like Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.

Lake Huron and Georgian Bay were dawn-gray. Bullock pulled his crutches to him and struggled erect. A few feet away Macpherson was leaning over Lotus Lane's body while Tang and Bier looked on.

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"She's unconscious," said Macpherson. "A bruise the size of a four-bit piece over her right eye."

"What happened?" asked Tang.

Bullock was examining the flare gun. "These babies happen to be a hobby of mine," he said. "This one's interesting. Watch." When he pulled the trigger nothing happened. "Now what does any normal person do?" he asked.

"He looks down the barrel to see what's stuck," said Bier. Tang nodded agreement.

"Right," said Bullock and did just that. A second later the firing pin clicked. "Heads will roll, believe you me," said Bullock grimly. "This was a personal gift to yours truly from the Prime Minister. He even had the ordinance boys give it a special tune-up. Wait till he hears they botched the job." Bullock looked at Tang and Bier. "All this means that I can't arrest you guys." He nodded at the flag. "But I can still deport you as undesirable aliens."

"If we go, Macpherson goes," said Tang. "The Hippocratic Oath says he can't abandon a patient."

Macpherson was bathing Lotus Lane's temples. "You're all fit as fiddles," he said. "The casts were just to slow you down a bit. Three against one are stiff odds." Tang and Bier cried out and scrabbled at the plaster with their fingers. Bullock stood stunned. Macpherson shrugged. "Anyone can rent a Mountie suit, Bullock," he said.

Tang and Bier were bashing at their casts with rocks. Though Bullock's leg quivered for attention he took time to advise them. "That's too short range. Mr. Bier, you work on Mr. Tang's cast and vice versa. May this be a lesson in international cooperation for you both." He freed his own leg with a hammer from his survival kit.

A sandy-haired man wearing glasses and a tweed topcoat appeared in the temple doorway. Bay Den Pol and his Boy Scouts were peeking in from behind him. Bullock stopped scratching. "It's Wickett. Hey, Wickett!" he shouted. They had met several years before while Wickett had been cultural and military attaché at the Canadian Embassy in San Marino. Wickett smiled weakly. His lips were blue.

"I see you ran into the Neutralists," said Bullock.

Wickett made a face. "I was gagging on my ballpoint pen when the Boy Scouts sent them scurrying off with some crazy story about a secret Coca-Cola

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bottling plant in the jungle. I—" Wickett saw the flag. He turned dead-white.

Bullock lowered his eyes modestly. "Welcome to Canada East," he said.

"Bullock," whispered Wickett, "you didn't claim this God-forsaken flood land for Canada?"

Bullock, grinning from ear to ear, nodded.

"But this makes us imperialists," said Wickett, struggling to control his voice. "And we'll have to build a post office and rent a gunboat to protect Canadian interests." He whistled through his teeth. "Boy, wait till Ottawa hears this one!"

Crestfallen, Bullock mumbled, "Couldn't we just unclaim it?" He made the motion of pulling a flagpole out of the ground.

Wickett shook his head. "We're stuck with it. Geography books would be in a heck of a mess if countries could claim land one minute and unclaim it the next. Well," he added, unslinging a camera, "I still need some pictures so the folks back home can see that no harm's come to their beloved doctor."

Macpherson was fussing around Lotus Lane. She was sitting up, her back against a worn statue of the serpent Naga. "This is Dr. Lane, an attempted murderer," said Bullock, by way of an introduction.

"I am?" said Lotus Lane vaguely, touching the bandage above her eye.

"Amnesia," explained Macpherson. "Tragic, isn't it? I had never really appreciated the true depths of her contempt for mankind. And then to have it blotted out in a single blow! But the Scouts have volunteered to carry her to my new hospital. There I will restore her precious memory. After that, who knows? True, she sees man as her natural enemy. But the world of missionary medicine is a lonely place. Together we might steal some happiness from it."

"Like Krog the Crow and Lopti the Stork," smiled Bullock.

Cocking an uneasy eyebrow at the Mountie, Wickett waved his camera. "Some pictures, Doctor. Okay? Let's start with one of you and your accordion." The shutter was soon clicking away.

Those were the next day's front-page pictures around the world. But there is another one sitting in a frame among the mementoes on top of the Bullock television set. Standing there in the over-exposed

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interior of a Mandalasian temple are, left to right: Tang and his little red book; Bay Den Pol and three saluting Boy Scouts (the fourth was holding the camera); Dr. Macpherson and his accordion; a seated and blank-faced Lotus Lane; Bullock with one foot bare; an uncomfortable Wickett; and Bier with an unlit cigarette between his teeth.

As for all the smiles, Bullock had just called on everyone to say "Cheese"—just as a moment or two before he had shouted, "Listen, everybody! Before we go our separate ways let's have a shot with all of us in it. For old time's sake."

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"Remember, Joey, all the things you see in this room are in your imagination. They're not real . . ."

THE LITTLE DARK ROOM

by CAROLE ROSENTHAL

He didn't like being locked in this way. All alone in the damp winter darkness with the lights off. And even when cars passed below on the hazy street, their beams flickering on the cracked ceiling, his terror did not lessen. The lights were like strange wordless messages, like signals from someone unknown.

Still, he was glad when he could see. If the snakes hiding under the bed crawled toward him—if spiders came out of the walls—if the closet door opened and a red giant appeared—it was better to *know* than to lie waiting in bed, covers pulled tight around his body, and a silent parched scream tense in his throat.

But he couldn't scream tonight. About that Mommy had been firm.

"If you scream tonight, Joey," she said, pulling his arms through the sleeves of his yellow cotton pajamas, "I'm going to be so angry at you. Mommy needs all the sleep she can get since the new baby came. Do you understand?"

He understood so well that his neck stiffened and he couldn't even nod.

"Bend your head, Joey," Mommy said. "I can't spend all night just getting you ready for bed."

And Mommy, who smelled so good—just like chocolate pudding—hurried Joey down the hall to the little dark room.

"It's your own little room, after all," Mommy said, smoothing his hair with her cool shadowy hand, "and you should be very glad to have it. Remember, Joey, all the things you see in this room are in your imagination. They're not real!"

Then, her body looming over Joey, she pressed her damp lips to his cheek, leaving a small snail track of affection. "You're a big boy now, Joey, and there's nothing to be frightened of. Not another peep out of you tonight."

Joey held the hem of Mommy's rose-colored night-

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gown, but Mommy was pulling away from him. She opened the door and flicked off the light. Her shadow said softly, "Go to sleep, Joey"—and the door shut, then clicked as she turned the lock from the other side to keep Joey in his room. Last week, while Mommy was still asleep, he had almost started a fire trying to cook breakfast.

Her house slippers swished rapidly down the hall.

Joey lay rigid in the narrow bed, his shoulders bunched forward on the pillow, the white sheet pulled up against his small pointed chin. If he didn't move, *they* would think he was dead, would come up near him and see a hunched, unbreathing white shell in yellow pajamas, and would go away.

He shut his eyes. When he opened them it would be morning. Mommy would unlock the door and he would play in the sunlit kitchen.

He opened his eyes. It was very dark.

Nothing moved around him. Mommy had forgotten to pull down the window shade and he could see by the light from the neighboring apartment building that the clothes in his chair had not yet changed shape, that the closet door was still closed. And as he settled back in bed, arms pressed against his body, he noticed that he could see people moving around inside two windows of the adjoining building. Like in a television set. He saw the people very clearly when they stood near the windows, though when they moved farther back in the room he had to squint to see. He decided to watch them until the lights went off. That way he would be safe.

In one window a balding man with a large sagging belly stood in his undershirt and watched himself in the mirror on his closet door. In the other window Mr. and Mrs. Shafer—Joey knew them because Mommy and her friends used to talk about them—were eating dinner in their kitchen and Mrs. Shafer seemed to be yelling at her husband until his face turned the color of the spaghetti sauce he was eating.

Joey took one more look around his room before settling back to watch. "You're not real," he whispered, daring *them* out loud to come into the open. Nothing moved.

The Fat Man in one of the windows walked toward the center of his room, faced Joey, and slowly bent down with his arms outstretched in front of him, disappearing from sight. Then, like a jack-in-the-box, he bobbed back up again quickly. Joey smiled appreciatively. He

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did it again, and this time Joey laughed.

In the next window Mr. Shafer tugged at his ear and stood up behind the table.

Joey watched the bouncing Fat Man for a while. *Up!* Down. *Up!* Down. Faster and faster.

In the adjoining apartment he saw Mrs. Shafer punching her fists into her hips, her big apron stretching smooth across her stomach as she loomed over her husband.

Then the Fat Man went down and didn't bounce up again right away. Joey craned his neck, but he couldn't see him. When the Fat Man rose slowly back into view, his face was round and red, and he leaned his hands against the window sill, shaking his head. He stayed that way for a time, then he began to rhythmically flex his arms back and forth across his chest.

Where was Mr. Shafer? Joey couldn't find him when he turned back to the other window, though Mrs. Shafer still stood in the same spot. Joey squinted hard. Mr. Shafer had moved way back in the kitchen, in the shadows near the cupboard.

The Fat Man did something funny again. He walked back to the mirror, poked his fingers into his ears, and began wiggling his fingers. Then he smacked himself hard with the flat of his hand against his stomach. Gosh, he was silly! Joey didn't know grownups played silly games.

Mr. and Mrs. Shafer were now chasing each other around the table, and Joey thought they were being silly, too. Mr. Shafer held one hand low at his waist and walked in a strange sideways and crablike way toward his wife. She seemed to be telling him something, her head jerking up and down and her fingers running through her hair. She reached behind her uncertainly and put her hand on a chair.

The Fat Man drew up a faded green armchair and began to read.

Both windows were still. Joey hoped they wouldn't turn the lights off soon. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Shafer lurched backward into her window. Pink kitchen curtains fell half out of the open window and onto the fire escape. Mr. Shafer, only partially visible behind his wife, his chin almost resting on his hunched shoulder, edged slowly forward.

Why didn't the Fat Man get up and do something? Joey didn't really like this any more. It was like the time he watched "Pinocchio" on television, and Pinocchio got locked in a cage. Later that afternoon Joey had come down with chicken pox

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and he had cried and cried.

Mr. Shafer had a knife in his hand.

"You're not real," Joey said to the window. Hadn't Mommy said so? And didn't she tell him that things weren't real on television? It was only his imagination.

A mysterious change came over Mrs. Shafer. Her back still filled up the window frame, and she neither stirred nor yelled, but her entire body changed. She seemed shrunken, as if her clothes had suddenly grown too large, or as if an enormous tiredness was settling on her. After a long stillness she shuddered, and Mr. Shafer darted forward. Quickly. Not like a crab any more, but like a snake, uncoiling his right arm at her stomach.

Mrs. Shafer turned around in the window and screamed. Her mouth was bigger and more like a cave than Joey could have imagined. For a moment she rose and her rage trumpeted across the air shaft before her voice rattled like an almost-empty cookie jar. She stopped abruptly and slid backward, sinking flabbily out of sight.

Maybe Mommy would wake up from all that noise. Maybe she would rush in with a thermometer and turn on the light. "I told you that what happened in this room was your imagination, Joey," she would say as she pulled down the window shade. "So what in the world are you so frightened of?"

He knotted his thumb into the stretchy material of his pajama top and shut his eyes except for a tiny slit. In the Shafer window Mrs. Shafer was crawling across the floor, little burbles of spit coming out of her lips, just like Baby after he ate. Her white apron turned very red across the stomach, and Mr. Shafer, still holding the long knife, was on his knees beside her and wiping his eyes. Then he stood up, backed across the room, knocked over a chair, and crawled through the window onto the fire escape where the pink curtains hung limply. He inhaled a great big gasp of wet air and crouched against the side of the building.

The door in the Shafer kitchen splintered and a hand came through it. The Fat Man, followed by three women in bathrobes, opened the door and the women started screaming.

Mr. Shafer, crouched pale and wet in a dark corner of the fire escape across from Joey, began to shake.

Joey was shaking, too. He pulled the covers over his head and pushed the pillow against his mouth. He must not scream, though. Over and over again he

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recited the alphabet to himself.

When he finally peeked again, it was because he heard a noise. But he pretended he didn't.

Why didn't the noise go away?

A deep breath, a scream really, gathered in the bottom of his stomach. But it wouldn't work itself up fast enough.

His eyes widened.

Mr. Shafer's narrow body heaved as he threw one leg and then the other across Joey's window sill.

Joey couldn't move. He had known he couldn't move if anything *really* happened, if Mommy had been wrong. His body grew stiff, as inflexible as a floorboard. His chest felt cold and empty, his throat closed so tight he couldn't squeak. And Mommy wouldn't come even if he screamed. So he pretended to be dead.

Mr. Shafer's sour breath filled the room and closed in on Joey. A quivering hand tensed on his shoulder, moist nostrils came near his cheek. Joey pushed the round hard knots of his breath into his chest. Even he could hardly feel himself alive. When Mr. Shafer nudged him with an elbow, Joey stayed still, and when the cool knife pressed against his neck he didn't move. He was dead already, he told himself.

"Boy?" Mr. Shafer's tiny voice said close to Joey's ear. "I want you to answer if you're not asleep."

Joey didn't answer.

Mr. Shafer wrapped his stringy arms around Joey, pulling him up very close, until Joey could feel his own heart beating. It beat very fast, very fluttery, like the heart of the sick cat Joey had once found in the rain and brought home. It scared him, but still he didn't move. Finally, the arms let go and Mr. Shafer shuffled backward, stumbling.

"I didn't mean to do it." Mr. Shafer made little snuffling noises. "If you hear me, believe me, but don't say so because if you do I'll have to kill you." He started crying so loud that Joey *almost* moved. "I'm not a killer! I'm not a killer at all!"

For a long time—maybe hours—Joey stayed dead. It was safer that way, here in this little dark room, where Mr. Shafer crouched against the window holding the long shiny kitchen knife and listening to the police noises across the air shaft. And lying so still, Joey found himself getting very, very tired. It wasn't real anyway. Mommy had said so, and Mommy who smelled so clean and felt so soft, who fed him pancakes in the morning and poured golden syrup over them, Mommy

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wouldn't lie to him. Nothing that happened in this room at night was real, she had said, and waves of sleep were beginning to spread over him like vast blue sails.

Occasionally Mr. Shafer's sobs pierced the cool oceanic air in which Joey floated, but the blue sails soon billowed and carried him away . . .

The dusty morning light was filtering slowly into the room. The ragged sound of crying made Joey start awake. He saw Mr. Shafer fumble at the locked door to his bedroom and then, muttering, back away, and crawl out onto the fire escape.

Mr. Shafer rose unsteadily, leaning against the railing. Then Joey heard crashing, rattling sounds. A long scream, rising and falling like a broken doll's voice, started near Joey's window and grew farther and farther away, ending a long distance below his room.

He pulled the pillow over his head. It was very soft and he was very tired. When Mommy unlocked the door he would get up and play.

The morning sun glinted hard and brittle on the other side of the kitchen window. But under the table, where Joey crouched on his hands and knees, there were shadows. Joey was a wild lion hiding in jungle underbrush, waiting for someone to fight. He placed his paw firmly down on the black-and-white linoleum tile grass. King of the Jungle!

Mommy's nylon-encased leg, long and inviting, waggled slowly back and forth in front of him as she sat talking on the telephone.

"Well, Nancy," she said, "I can't tell you how shocking it was. I mean, fighting is one thing, but something like that happening right in the next building . . ."

She paused. "Yes, d-e-a-d as a doornail, right under our window, and all covered with more b-l-o-o-d than . . . No, I'm spelling because a certain person is sitting right here under the table playing . . .

"Joey? Would you believe it? Slept right through it! First time he didn't wake me since the baby came. I've been telling him that the things he saw in his room at night weren't real and I guess he finally overcame his imaginary fears."

She reached down to ruffle Joey's hair.

"Funny, isn't it? Kids have such strange ideas of reality. I wonder where they get them from."

Joey gathered a mighty roar in his mouth. He wondered how loud Mommy would yell if he took a big bite of her leg.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Rub someone out right in the high-school parking lot? With teachers present? With nearly 2000 students as possible eyewitnesses? Preposterous! At least, that's what the principal thought; and Detective Sergeant Roberts and his partner David Bell were more than inclined to agree.

But Mr. Strang did not agree. The gnomelike little science teacher of Aldershot High School believed the evidence of his eyes—observation—and backed it up with the evidence of his brain—logical analysis . . .

MR. STRANG FINDS A CAR

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

For nine blocks the nondescript, gray four-door sedan had been following the yellow school bus with ALDERSHOT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT painted on its side. When the bus turned into the long curving driveway behind Aldershot High School, the gray car continued to follow. Louis Markham, the driver of the bus, found nothing odd in this; many parents drove their kids to school on the way to work.

On reaching the rear corner of the building, the car stopped in a position which commanded a view of both the teachers' parking lot and the fenced athletic field where almost 2000 students were milling about, waiting for the entrance bell.

The driver of the gray car kept his eyes riveted on the bus—Number 81—as it pulled up to a gate in the fence. He took little notice of the slight gray-haired teacher who stood near one of the doors of the building, waving to the students as they climbed out of the bus, chattering like magpies, and walked to the gate.

And then the last student, a boy, got off. A tall, lanky, studious type, the boy wore thick glasses mounted on his

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beak of a nose. His sweat shirt, on which there was a picture of the dog Snoopy dancing with joy, seemed to accentuate the boy's rounded shoulders and skinny arms. The boy stood for a moment, checking through the thick bundle of books under his arm.

And in that moment the driver of the gray car slammed it into gear. There was the roar of an engine racing, then two tracks of scorched rubber were plastered on the smoking asphalt as the rear wheels fought for traction. Rocketing forward, the car bore down on the boy at a rapidly increasing speed.

He looked up wide-eyed at the noise, saw the deadly grillework of the car's radiator headed directly at him, and froze in panic.

A massive hand reached out from the door of the bus and yanked at the neck of the sweat shirt. Stumbling backward, the boy collapsed into a sitting position on the bus's step as the gray car shot by, only inches from his knees. But before he could stutter his thanks to Louis Markham, the gray car skidded to a halt and went into reverse. The boy quickly hauled his legs into the bus.

The gray car screeched to a stop next to the doorway of the bus. For a fraction of a second Markham and the driver of the gray car regarded each other. Markham's face was a study in shocked surprise. It was difficult to see the expression of the other man; he wore a wide-brimmed hat and dark sunglasses, and in spite of the heat had his jacket collar turned up. With a clash of meshing gears the gray car roared forward again, down the exit driveway, and out into the street. Markham attempted to get the license number but the plates had been liberally smeared with mud.

It was several minutes before Mr. Leonard Strang, at his position by the school's rear door, could calm his queasy stomach. It had all happened so fast. But for the quick thinking of Louis Markham, the boy Richie Hatch would now be lying dead on the asphalt pavement. On rubbery legs Mr. Strang approached the bus and asked Richie and Markham to accompany him to the principal's office to report the incident.

"Be reasonable, Mr. Strang. You, too, Louis. Why would anybody want to run down a student, especially right here in the school parking lot?" Marvin W. Guthrey, principal of Aldershot High School, looked incredulously at the two men and the boy seated on the

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opposite side of his desk. "Look, maybe the accelerator jammed—it's happened to me."

"Hey, wait a minute, Mr. Guthrey!" Markham banged an angry hand on the arm of his chair. "We were out there, remember? I tell you this guy deliberately tried to run Richie down."

"Not only that," added Mr. Strang, still trembling slightly, "but when he failed the first time—due to Louis's quick thinking—he came back for a second chance. Fortunately, Richie was inside the bus by then."

"Whoever it was probably just returned to see if Richie was all right," replied Guthrey.

"Why didn't he stop then?" growled the bus driver. "At least he could have given us some kind of apology or something. No sir, Mr. Guthrey. I got a good look at that character. He wasn't sorry for what he done—unless it was because he missed Richie."

"I thought you said his face was almost completely covered?" asked the principal.

"Yeah, but—" With a helpless shrug the bus driver turned to Mr. Strang. "You tell him, will you?" he pleaded. "Mr. Guthrey's not about to listen to me."

Slowly Mr. Strang pulled a pipe from his pocket, ramming tobacco into the bowl as he tried to collect his thoughts. "Richie was almost run down in the school parking lot just a few minutes ago," he said finally. "Let's take that as a starting point, Mr. Guthrey. You say it was an accident, while we maintain it was deliberate. Right so far?"

The principal nodded.

"Now I ask you to consider the following two things." The teacher began ticking them off on his fingers. "First, we were on the scene when it happened; you were not. I ask you who would make the more reliable witnesses."

The principal tried to interrupt, but Mr. Strang went on implacably. "Second, even though it's quite warm this morning the man wore a hat, dark sunglasses, and had his collar turned up. Wouldn't this suggest a disguise of sorts? And remember those muddy license plates, Mr. Guthrey. All the accouterments of a deliberate hit-and-run attempt."

"And on the basis of what you tell me I'm supposed to do—what?" asked the principal nervously.

"Why, call the police, of course," replied the teacher. "Get somebody down here who can look into this."

"But nobody was actually hurt," said Guthrey. "What am

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I supposed to tell them? I can't be having police in this building every time somebody makes a little mistake."

"And what if it's not just a 'little mistake'?" asked the teacher, puffing out a thick cloud of acrid smoke.

"What do you mean?"

"Let's assume, in spite of what we've told you, that the chances are, say, a hundred to one against its having been deliberate. Even then, would you want to take the gamble, Mr. Guthrey?"

"What gamble?"

"He means if it was deliberate, the guy might try again!" Markham shouted. "For some reason somebody wants Richie out of the way. Are you going to let them have another crack at him?"

Reluctantly Guthrey picked up the phone on his desk.

In the small conference room Richie Hatch, Mr. Strang, and Louis Markham sat in straight-backed chairs, flanked by Detective Sergeant Paul Roberts and Detective David Bell. "It's crazy, Mr. Roberts," Bell was saying. "Just crazy."

"What's crazy, Bell?" asked Roberts.

"Our being here," replied the younger detective. "We're assigned to four breakings-and-enterings, one possible kidnaping, and that sex molester who's supposed to be prowling the neighborhood. In addition there's that APB on the armored truck that was hijacked over in Wolverton, plans for guarding the mayor during the parade tomorrow, plus whatever else the lieutenant can dig up for us. And with a case load like that we're expected to waste time here listening to all this malarkey just because somebody's car went out of control."

"Nobody twisted your arm to get you out of uniform and into detectives," growled Roberts. But he couldn't help agreeing with Bell. The whole thing seemed such a trivial incident. If it had been anyone but Mr. Strang—

Roberts had gained a considerable respect for the teacher since that day, several years ago, when Mr. Strang had kept him from making a fool of himself in connection with a stolen car. Since then the wizened little science teacher had assisted Roberts unofficially on several cases, and the detective had a growing respect for Mr. Strang's abilities of observation and logical analysis. And even if there wasn't any real problem in this instance—well, Roberts guessed he owed the old boy at least a hearing.

"All right, Richie," said Bell.

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"Just tell me one thing. Why in hell would anybody want to run you down?"

"Uh, I don't know, sir," answered the boy.

"You see, that's the hangup—no motive. Think about it, Richie. What could a school kid possibly be doing that would make somebody want to kill him? Tell me, what do you do after school? What crowd do you hang around with? Have you any enemies?"

"I don't hang around with anybody too much," replied the boy. "Usually I go right home after school and do my homework. Then I mow the lawn or do anything else my mother wants. We have supper at about seven—that's when my dad comes home—and after that, I either watch TV or work on my insect collection."

"Richie's quite an entomologist," added Mr. Strang proudly. "His insect collection won second prize at the County Science Fair."

"Yeah, great," muttered Bell. "Maybe that car was driven by a mad tse-tse fly."

"Lay off, Bell," snapped Roberts. He turned to Mr. Strang, tearing a sheet from the yellow lined pad in front of him. "I guess that's it," he continued softly. "Here's a preliminary report on what you've told us. I'd like the three of you to read it over. If you have no additions or corrections I'll see what I can do about locating that gray sedan. But I can't guarantee any results. You haven't given us much to go on."

Mr. Strang read the report quickly, then passed it on to Richie, who flipped his thick glasses up onto his forehad and peered at the writing. "You believe us, don't you, Paul?" asked the teacher.

"Oh, I believe a car came close to hitting Richie. But as for its being deliberate—well, I dunno, Mr. Strang. You make quite a thing of the guy's not stopping. But maybe it was just embarrassment. After all, he'd almost killed somebody. He backed up to see that nobody was hurt, and when he found out Richie was okay, he just got out of there before anyone could tell him what kind of a numskull he was."

"Oh—ctenophora!" snapped the teacher. "Somebody tried to kill Richie. I don't know the reason. But there's got to be an answer somewhere."

As the detectives were about to leave, Bell turned to Mr. Strang. "Maybe you just aren't asking the right questions," he drawled.

"But shouldn't the boy be given some kind of protection?" Mr. Strang asked

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Roberts, ignoring Bell's remark.

Roberts shook his head. "This is too far-fetched," he said. "The lieutenant wouldn't authorize it." Seeing Mr. Strang's hands quiver, the detective went on in a softer voice. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll pick Richie up after school and drive him home myself. He ought to be safe in his own house. That's the best I can do."

That afternoon Richie Hatch left the front door of the school accompanied by both Paul Roberts and Mr. Strang. As they headed toward the detective's car, none of the three noticed the heavily muscled man in the green sports shirt lounging against the telephone booth down the block. On spotting Richie, the man entered the booth dialed a number, and began speaking into the mouthpiece. Roberts' car passed within a dozen feet of the booth.

Ten minutes later the detective pulled onto Waverly Crescent. That road, nearly a quarter of a mile long, formed a huge semicircle. The densely wooded area on the outskirts of Aldershot had once been a favorite area for Mr. Strang's biology-class nature walks; now, however, four houses were spaced along the length of the crescent, and the builder had informed the school authorities there would be more to come. Richie Hatch's house, a shingled split-level, was at the very end of the road.

"Mom must be out somewhere," said Richie as Roberts pulled into the driveway. "Her car's not here. Thanks for the lift. I'll be seeing you tomorrow, Mr. Strang."

From the rear seat Mr. Strang waved vaguely. "The right questions," he whispered to himself as Richie padded across the lawn toward the front door.

"What's that, Mr. Strang?"

"Nothing, Paul. I was just thinking about what your partner, Mr. Bell, said today. 'Maybe you just aren't asking the right questions.' But if—Richie, stop!"

Startled, Roberts turned around in his seat. "Did the kid forget something?"

"No, I did." The teacher got out of the car and beckoned to the boy, who was in the act of unlocking the front door. Richie returned to the car.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Council of war." Mr. Strang motioned the boy back into the car, got in himself, and tapped Roberts on the shoulder. "Mr. Bell is smarter than I thought," he murmured, smiling. "The right question—I should have thought of it myself."

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"What are you getting at, Mr. Strang?" asked Roberts.

The gnomelike little science teacher rubbed his hands together. "Let's assume for a moment that whoever was driving that car this morning deliberately tried to kill Richie. When we talked about it earlier, we were questioning motive. Why, you asked then, would anybody want to do such a thing? But that's the wrong question. Try this one: why would anyone want to do it on the high-school parking lot?"

Roberts shook his head in confusion. "I don't get you."

"If someone wanted to kill Richie, wouldn't the high-school parking lot be the last place they'd choose? Teachers on duty, and about two thousand potential witnesses among the students alone. It was only dumb luck that Richie was the last student to get off the bus and that he was alone when the car tried to hit him."

"Not really," said the boy. "You see, I'm the first one on in the morning, Mr. Strang. The bus has to come way out here just for me, and I always take the rear seat. And even then, the bus doesn't come all the way to the end of the crescent. I cut across the lots to where Waverly Crescent meets the main road and get picked up there."

"All right, all right," said the teacher impatiently. "But that doesn't change the fact that you live in a comparatively deserted area. And if somebody wanted to kill you, the obvious place would be here, certainly not a crowded school yard. Why, then, did the attempted crime take place where it did?"

"If there was a crime, Mr. Strang," said the detective. "What you've just said is a pretty good indication there *wasn't.*"

"Wait, Paul. If the attempt was deliberate, why in such a public place?"

"Okay, I'll bite," said Roberts. "Why, Mr. Strang?"

"There's only one reason I can come up with that makes any sense," said the teacher. "Paul, something must have happened early this morning before Richie got on the school bus. He either saw or heard something—something the driver of that gray car felt would be dangerous to him. Before Richie could be stopped out here, he'd reached the school bus and was picked up. Our mysterious Mr. X felt that Richie had to be stopped at any cost before he'd communicated whatever he'd seen or heard. So he followed the bus to school and made a desperate attempt to kill Richie just as he stepped off."

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Mr. Strang turned to the boy. "Come on, Richie," he said. "What was it? What did you see this morning? What did you hear?"

There was a long pause as Richie pushed his glasses up onto his forehead and gazed at the teacher. "I don't know, Mr. Strang," he said finally. "I don't remember seeing or hearing anything."

Both Mr. Strang's face and spirits drooped. "Nothing?" he asked with a plaintive sigh. Richie shook his head.

"Okay, that's enough." Roberts turned the ignition key and the starter whirred. "Let me take you home, huh?"

"Just a minute." Mr. Strang waved his hand impatiently. "Richie," he said slowly, "maybe you don't realize that what you saw or heard was important. Please, would you tell us everything that happened to you this morning from the time you got up until you got on the bus—everything, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

"Let's see." Richie considered the question for a moment. "Well, first I got dressed. Brushed my teeth. Then I went down and Mom gave me my breakfast. It was oatmeal."

"Then what? After you left the house?"

"I cut through the woods in back on my way to the bus stop. Did you know there's a bee tree out there, Mr. Strang? They were buzzing like crazy this morning."

"Never mind Mother Nature," groaned Roberts. "Get on with your story."

"I walked through the Killian's back yard and put out food for their spaniel. They're away for the month and they asked me to feed and water the dog. I saw a praying mantis on the window sill of the garage. It was busy eating a beetle, and I got real close to it. Mr. Roberts, do you know that mantises kill all sorts of harmful—"

"Spare me the bugs, Richie. Please. Just finish your story so Mr. Strang and me can get out of here."

"All right. Back in the woods I found a place where some kids must have been digging. There was a deep hole near the stream that goes through there."

"A hole," mused the teacher. "Anything in it?"

"Nothing but a broken robin's egg. I spotted three gray squirrels just before I came out of the woods and I could have sworn I heard the chirping of a—"

Paul Roberts thought he would go mad.

A car rolled slowly by them and pulled up into the

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driveway. "Mom's home," said Richie. "Would you like to meet her?"

"Some other time," said Roberts in a tired voice. "And, Richie. When you tell her about what happened today, don't make it too dramatic. A car went out of control and you came close to being hit—that's all. But this other stuff—well, sometimes Mr. Strang lets his imagination run away with him."

The teacher folded his arms and stared ahead in stony silence.

In the woods behind the Hatch house a large woman wearing a dark green coat which blended with the foliage ducked back behind the trunk of a huge willow tree and lowered a pair of high-power binoculars. Kneeling next to her was a stocky young man in blue jeans and a T-shirt under which his muscles bulged. The man looked up at his partner.

"What do you think, Doris? What did you see out there?"

"The kid's with two men," she answered, "just the way Larry told us on the phone. The little scrawny one with the gray hair wouldn't be too hard to handle, but the big one's got cop written all over him. We'd better lay low, at least until Larry gets back."

"A cop," muttered the man. "Hell's bells, Doris, if that kid told the cops what he seen—"

"Take it easy. I don't think he realizes yet that he saw anything important. Otherwise this whole area would be swarming with police. Probably he just told the cop about Larry's almost running him down this morning."

"Too damn bad he missed," the man grumbled. "That kid might remember any time. Hey, look! The car's leavin'. Now's my chance to get over there an'—"

"Calm down," said Doris. "The kid's inside the house now with his old lady. What happens if you try to break in there and one of 'em manages to get to a telephone? The kid's forgotten all about it, I tell you. And we'll be out of here in another few hours."

"When? What time?"

"We can't even start unloading until after ten. About midnight, I guess."

"What about the kid? Shouldn't he still be wasted?"

"Maybe. Let's see what Larry says when he gets back."

When Paul Roberts dropped him off at his boardinghouse Mr. Strang was still furious. "Let my imagination run away with me, do I?" he grumbled to himself. "I'll show him that—"

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But the teacher wasn't really prepared to show the detective anything. What could Richie have seen? A bee's nest, a praying mantis, a hole, a robin's egg, some squirrels; they seemed innocent enough.

"Platyhelminthes!" He spat out the word—Phylum VI in the classification of animals—in a tone that would have brought a blush to the face of a mule skinner. Then, feeling somewhat better, he sat down with the newspaper to await supper.

A short while later a mouth-watering smell from the kitchen brought the teacher to his feet. Pot roast. Quietly he tiptoed to the kitchen door. A large kettle was bubbling on the stove. He lifted the lid and a cloud of steam rose upward.

Tiny droplets of water settled onto Mr. Strang's glasses and for a moment he was blind. Replacing the lid he removed the glasses to polish them on his tie. But then he stopped. Holding the glasses in front of him he glanced first at the lenses and then at the wall behind the stove. There was something else Bell had said this morning, something about—

And then he remembered.

Hoping against hope that he wasn't already too late, the teacher scuttled back into the living room, picked up the telephone, and dialed Paul Roberts' number.

It was after nine o'clock, and darkness had fallen when Roberts, accompanied by Mr. Strang, again reached Waverly Crescent. The detective pulled the car to the curb, turned off the ignition, and killed the lights. "We'll walk from here," he whispered to the teacher. "It's a good thing there aren't any street lights this far out."

"There's a full moon though," replied Mr. Strang. "We'll still have to be careful."

"I hope you're right about all this," said Roberts.

They passed two houses, keeping to the darkness on the opposite side of the street.

The Killian house was completely dark. "That figures," breathed Roberts. "Richie said they were away." The two men crept closer, keeping trees between themselves and the dark house.

Finally they reached the garage. "There's a border of rocks along here," Roberts told the teacher. "Be careful you don't trip. I'm going to use my flashlight. I'll try to keep it masked as much as possible, but—what's that?"

There was a rustling sound from the far side of the garage, followed by an odd moaning. The teacher snapped to attention, then relaxed. "The dog,"

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he whispered. "He's behind the house in the kennel."

"Oh." Roberts brushed a film of dirt from the garage window with the sleeve of his jacket. Then, from a pocket, he removed a small flashlight. Cupping one hand carefully around it he pressed the switch and held the light against the windowpane.

Mr. Strang peered through the glass. The car inside would have been close enough to touch had the window been open. "Gray four-door sedan," breathed the teacher softly. "I'll give you odds that's the car that almost ran down Richie this morning."

"Yeah, sure," replied the detective impatiently. "Only—holy Moses on a bicycle! Look!"

As he moved the light, Mr. Strang could see the huge thing that reared up on the other side of the two-car garage. It was constructed of thick plates of steel, held together with numerous rivets, the heads of which spotted the brown surface like warts on the back of some prehistoric monster.

"There's lettering on one plate," said Roberts. "B-I-L-L-I—Billikin!" He breathed the word in an awed voice. "The Billikin Armored Car Service. One of their trucks was hijacked near Wolverton two days ago—with over a hundred and fifty grand in silver bars inside."

The teacher nodded. "I remembered that your partner mentioned it this morning," he said.

"You were right, Mr. Strang, when you said there was something important in this garage. Come on. I've got to get word back to headquarters. If we're lucky, maybe the silver's still inside there."

"It is. But your luck's about run out."

At the sound of the voice behind them, Roberts and Strang whirled about. As the teacher's eyes adjusted to the darkness he could just make out in the moonlight the figure of a woman—a mountainous figure in a dark coat. And as Roberts pointed the flashlight in her direction the teacher saw the glitter of a pistol in her hand.

"Point that light the other way," rumbled the woman. "Right at your own face. I like to have my targets well lighted. You're the two who were at the kid's house earlier, aren't you?"

There was the slamming of a door and a second figure, a man, walked over next to the woman. "What have you got here, Doris?" he asked. "A couple of snoopers?"

"Yeah, Larry. I guess the kid finally remembered."

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"Mr. Strang here was smart enough to figure it out," said Roberts. Keep them talking, keep them talking. Get the woman's mind off that gun. Maybe there'd be a chance to grab it. "You might as well tell 'em about it," he said to the teacher gruffly. Come on, Mr. Strang, start talking. Stall for time.

Mr. Strang picked up the cue. "You saw Richie this morning, didn't you?" he asked.

"The kid? Sure," said the woman. "He had his nose less than a foot from the garage window. I looked out from the kitchen and there he was."

"He was only looking at a praying mantis—an insect—on the window sill."

"Okay, but he couldn't help seeing the armored car in there."

"As a matter of fact," said the teacher, "it really was impossible for him to see the armored car."

"Yeah, so you say," rumbled the man. "How come?"

"Richie's near-sighted," explained the teacher. He crouched as if terrified by the menace of the gun pointed at Roberts. "He needs glasses, but only for seeing at a distance. For close observation he has to take the glasses off. Or else moves them up to his forehead. I spotted this habit twice today but only realized its importance later when I was forced to remove my own glasses. So you see, if Richie was watching the mantis at close range, he wouldn't have been wearing his glasses." Mr. Strang crouched still lower, seeming to cower before the pistol.

"Yeah, that's right," said the woman. "He had 'em on his forehead like a flier's goggles." Roberts still had the light turned on himself. Bending forward from his crouched position, the teacher felt his hands make contact with one of the large rocks that formed a border beside the garage. Lifting it slightly, he estimated its weight at about 15 pounds.

"And the armored car was at the opposite side of the garage from him," the teacher continued. "It would have been nothing but a blur to him. Besides which, the garage was dark and the glass was dirty. No, your secret was safe. Until you tried to run the boy down, that is."

The woman turned to the man beside her. "See, idiot!" she barked. "I told you it would be all right. But no, you had to go after him. You had to try a hit-and-run right at the school. Of all the stupid—"

Mr. Strang took a deep breath, then heaved the rock,

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his joints cracking at the unaccustomed effort. The rock arched silently through the air.

"Hey!" The woman had time to utter only the single syllable before the rock struck her full in the stomach. The teacher could hardly have missed so large a target at such short range.

"Doris, what—"

"Hold it, both of you!" Keeping the flashlight steady on the man and the woman, Roberts pulled out his own pistol. "Mr. Strang, get their gun. And make sure you don't get between me and them."

Mr. Strang made sure.

Roberts had just finished handcuffing the two when he heard the rear door of the house slam. Quickly he moved the light in that direction.

The man in the doorway shook his head groggily, rubbing his eyes with huge fists. "Doris," he mumbled in a voice heavy with sleep. "Turn 'at thing off. You were the one said no lights aroun' here. An' keep the chatter down. How's a guy expected to sleep when—"

He was still not fully awake when Roberts jammed the pistol into his ribs and forced him to lean against the wall to be searched.

The three prisoners were marched down Waverly Crescent. When they reached Roberts' car, the detective put in a call on the two-way radio. A few minutes later two patrol cars arrived to take the three criminals away.

Gingerly the old teacher handed Roberts the pistol he had been holding. "Do you suppose the Killians were in on it?" he asked.

"We'll check it out," replied Roberts, "but I doubt it. It wouldn't be hard for those three to spot an isolated house where the owners were away on vacation. The society pages of the papers are full of information like that."

He got into the car and slammed the door. "C'mon," he said. "I've got to get back to Richie's house."

"Why, Paul?" asked the teacher. "You don't think he's still in danger?"

"No. But in a few minutes this street will be crawling with police, men from the District Attorney's office, and newspaper reporters. And before they all get here and begin listening to what I have to say, I've got some high-powered apologizing to do for not believing Richie and you in the first place."

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a NEW detective story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Can the oil portrait of a murdered woman be haunted? Can such a painting somehow identify her killer? Actually call out the murderer's name? Point to the murderer with a hand that moves? A living, moaning, accusing portrait? . . .

Dr. Guy Nearing, curator of the museum, could not tear himself away from the portrait that, in its way, was more mysterious than the Mona Lisa . . .

THE HAUNTED PORTRAIT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Sometimes I watch a guide bring his group into Gallery 18, in the East Wing of the museum. Usually they are a mixed group of sightseers, and they come to see this particular canvas. They stare at it and mutter to each other. Then the guide speaks.

"The picture you're looking at," he says, "is a portrait of Evelyn Anders, and it was painted shortly before her tragic death. The artist is Swithin St. John, and this is considered his masterpiece.

"I call your attention to the eyes. Please notice the way they follow you no matter where you go. You can't escape them. They watch everybody who comes into this room, and it's said that they're seeking out her killer and will accuse him when he comes into this room. If he is here now—"

The crowd giggles nervously. There *is* something about the eyes. They were painted with a mixture of oil and luminous paint, and the effect is eerie.

"It is also said," the guide continues, after the crowd has become quiet, "that she will actually speak. Others maintain that her hands will move. Please study the hands."

They are worth studying. They seem restless, as if they had something to do but were not sure what. They appear to have a life of their own.

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"Employees of the museum were the first to hear the sounds. They usually occur towards late afternoon, shortly before the museum closes, but they have been heard at other times, too. Please listen."

The people in the group strain their ears. Hearing nothing, they look at each other sheepishly, as if they had been duped. But sometimes they catch the sound of a moan. It may be faint and far off, but it is unmistakable. The crowd gasps, scarcely able to believe. Occasionally a woman, oversuggestible, screams. The group stands there for a moment or so—the people are too stunned to move; then, as if released from a spell, one person after another starts to leave, to find his or her way to the main exit and to the fresh air outside.

Usually, however, there is silence, and after a few moments the guide continues: "It is believed, too," he says, "that Mrs. Anders wrote the name of her murderer, here on this canvas, and that some day the name will emerge in letters of blood. Or perhaps, as in the Bible, a hand will appear and write upon the wall: *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.* Does anyone see the words?"

The guide is laughing at his little joke. Then he turns and crosses the room. His shoes make sharp taps on the polished wooden floor.

I am Dr. Guy Nearing, curator of the museum, and at first I am delighted. A haunted portrait? Great—a happening! It should pull in the crowds, and it does. At one dollar a head.

But as time goes on I begin to dislike the crowds. They come to scoff, or else to stare at what they consider a freak. For me, however, it is something quite different. I find myself engrossed by it—whatever *it* is. Late afternoons or early evenings, after the museum has been closed to the public, I wander over to Gallery 18, and I look. I think of the few bits and pieces of the story that I know from having read the newspapers, and I am disturbed.

One night last March, Mrs. Ewald Anders, wife of a wealthy real-estate man reputed to be a front for the Syndicate, was stabbed to death while lying in bed. Her husband was away at the time. An undetermined amount of cash and about $20,000 worth of jewelry were taken, and the original assumption was that a cat burglar had climbed up to Mrs. Anders' bedroom on the second floor, and when she woke up and saw him, he knifed her in panic and fled. But the autopsy showed that she had taken several sleeping pills and that it

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was almost impossible for her to have awakened. It followed that the robbery therefore was a blind, and that the crime was deliberate murder. The police leaned to the theory of a hired killer. Still—why?

Swithin St. John, who painted the portrait, is Ewald Anders' half brother. They had the same mother—witness her fondness for the two stilted, exotic names. Swithin, Ewald—what a pair! At any rate, Anders gave Swithin the portrait commission. Over the years Anders had supported his half brother and even arranged for a couple of one-man shows which, for some reason, had been flops. Thus the name of Swithin St. John was hardly known until he did the portrait of Evelyn . . .

I stare at it in the dim light of the closed gallery. The eyes, gleaming, iridescent, gaze back at me. I want to leave, but I cannot. The painting has a strange obsessive quality, a latent sexuality that somehow the artist's brush has brought out. I realize that over and above the legend and the publicity that have made the painting notorious it is unquestionably a masterpiece.

I keep asking myself why. What precise quality, what shade or flush of emotion has lifted this portrait out of the ruck and made it so magnetic, so outstanding? For, as surely as I stand here in the empty museum, St. John has communicated something deeply human in Evelyn Anders.

It bothers me. It keeps bothering me. I can't let it go. I come here at night, not because I believe a painting can tell me anything about a murderer, but because I am haunted by it, by the subject. I stand here and I think of her as if she were still alive. I begin to wish that some harm would come to her—she seems almost to be asking for it—and I have an impulse to lash out and end forever this unnatural spell.

But I do not move away. Instead I turn on my flashlight and slide the beam slowly along the length of her arms. I feel as if I were caressing her, and the thought horrifies me. I focus the light on her painted eyes. They are silvery and lustrous, but they are also tragically sad—as if they had glimpsed her ultimate fate.

Finally I turn away, shaken, for I have learned something I wasn't supposed to know. But what? What dark secret? Whatever it is, it remains in some lower segment of my brain, pressing in, torturing me, but never coming to the surface.

Back in my office I sit down shivering. I take a drink, but it

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does no good. I leave the building. Dewey, one of the night watchmen, says good night to me, which is my first normal experience of the evening. It does not help. I go out to my car. Although the night is warm I feel so cold that I turn on the heater as I drive home.

I think of her the next day and I decide I must find out who killed her. Absurd? Of course. I admit it. Nevertheless I ask questions and I set about finding out all I can about her, about her husband and about St. John. The next day I manage to bring St. John to my office and lead the conversation around to Evelyn Anders.

He talks freely. He says she was obsessed with death, that she had little to live for. She had no children to occupy her thoughts and time, and her husband's extra-marital affairs were too flagrant for her to ignore them. Yet she was dominated by him and felt emotionally suffocated.

St. John breaks off abruptly and taps his fingers nervously on the arm of his chair. He is trying to tell me something that he fears to utter. He wants to blacken Ewald, wants to implicate him in a murder, but dares not. He is secretive, cryptic, oblique.

St. John's hate is obviously bitter and venomous, but he tries to control it. When he praises Ewald, the words stick in his throat. He manages to say that Ewald has charm, that women fall for him—beautiful women like Marguerita, the Spanish dancer known as La Flama, whose troupe is performing here this season. But in the middle of reciting Ewald's charm St. John blurts out that La Flama is more in love with Ewald's money than with Ewald himself.

St. John, I feel, is being pulled in opposite directions. He longs to accuse Ewald, but is afraid to, for Ewald supports him and St. John needs that monthly stipend. Besides, he can't forget that Evelyn was murdered by a killer who scaled a high wall and climbed a drainpipe in order to reach her room. St. John himself would never be safe. Not if he accused his half brother of murder. But what if the painting itself makes the accusation—is that St. John's subtle, devious method?

We talk of the portrait. I admire it, I praise its technique, and I say that only a painter who was in love with his subject could have achieved such a masterpiece.

St. John grows livid. "In love with Evelyn? Me?" But the very intensity of his denial convinces me that he was.

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He gets up in a fury. He can no longer restrain himself and he spews out his hate. He says Ewald was always sly, shrewd, dishonest. All he ever thought of was money and how to get the better of people. Ever since he and Ewald were children, Ewald managed to put the blame on St. John and take the credit for himself. Ewald lies, steals, kills. Even when Ewald finances exhibitions for St. John, Ewald managed to sabotage them at the same time. He ordered the gallery to cancel its advertising, and he arranged for devastatingly bad reviews.

After a while St. John calms down. He is aware that he has told me either too much or not enough, and he is still fuming when he leaves. I realize he's playing some kind of deep game, which leaves me in confusion. I decide that Ewald, with his underworld connections, would just as soon have had his wife killed as bother to divorce her. But I'm convinced that St. John had an affair with Evelyn and couldn't trust her with the secret. And if Ewald found out it would mean the end of St. John's allowance, if not of his life.

So—did St. John kill her, or did Ewald Anders? And what does La Flama know about it?

I decide I have to see her, so I buy a ticket for her next performance. It is in one of the smaller theaters, and I watch her in fascination. She is wearing black tights. She seems weightless. She whirls across the stage like a living flame, she seems to soar, to float, and she finishes in an amorous swoon. She is beautiful, and at the end of the evening I go to the stage entrance. I send my card in, my official one as curator of the museum, and I'm told that La Flama will see me.

I go into her dressing room. She is sitting in front of her mirror, and she turns around to greet me. I can sense some of the passion and excitement that she conveyed while she was performing onstage, but now it is muted. To my surprise she speaks English with no accent, and I compliment her on it.

"Ewald has had me take lessons," she says. "He does not like a—" She bites her lip and turns away. She has almost said *wife*, and is angry at herself for the near slip. "He does not like a friend to have a foreign accent," she says.

"You have a good ear," I say. "Even with lessons very few people can wholly overcome an accent."

"Very few people are like me," she says imperiously. "I was born a peasant and could neither read nor write until a few years ago. Now—why did

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you wish to see me?"

"I wondered if you could tell me anything about the portrait that St. John did of Evelyn," I say. "There are—"

She interrupts. "What would I know of that?" she says. "I do not like this conversation. The subject is unpleasant."

"Exactly," I say. "And that's why—"

She interrupts again. "I have no more time," she says. "Ewald is waiting for me. Please go."

I leave. I realize I should not have spoken to La Flama. My interest in the portrait is something I should have kept to myself. Evil surrounds that painting, permeates it. I ought not to subject other people to the spell.

I recall the circumstances under which Ewald donated the painting. I knew who he was, because part of my job is to obtain gifts and loans for the museum, and to accomplish that I have to know about every wealthy collector in the country. And Ewald Anders, with his fifty millions or more and a valuable art collection, was a name I knew well.

"Dr. Nearing," he said to me over the phone some four months ago, "I'm Ewald Anders. I want to donate some paintings to the museum."

"We'd be most grateful," I said, and we made an appointment.

Ewald's reputation was unsavory, and I was of course aware of it. He placed rackets money, mostly in real estate, and people were afraid to bid against him.

I expected a tough overbearing man, but Ewald was small-boned and delicate. Nevertheless he had a quality that made me keep agreeing with him. And I'm not a yes-man.

"You're wondering what I'm going to offer you, and why," he said. "But I guess you know something about my collection."

I nodded.

"I want you to exhibit a portrait of my deceased wife. My half brother, Swithin St. John, painted it."

"If I may see it—"

"You don't have to see it," he says. "Two hundred thousand dollars' worth of other paintings go with it. Take it or leave it—which?"

"I'll take it."

"Naturally. I'm sure you know how my wife was killed. Everybody does. Well, Swithin painted her portrait just before her death. I didn't get it until afterwards—he claimed he had to put in some finishing touches. Well, I want it out of the house."

I nodded again.

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"Let me tell you something. My wife was the kind of woman who practically begged to be hurt. You'll find out what I mean when you see the painting. Well, there's a story going around that I had something to do with her death, but when people see her face they'll realize why she was killed. She begged for it. Whoever went into her room and took her jewels saw her lying there and stabbed her. He couldn't help himself."

"I'm anxious to see that picture," I said.

Anders' eyes bore into me. "You'll hate it," he said . . .

The legend that Evelyn Anders would identify her murderer began shortly after the portrait was first exhibited. A clever publicity agent can plant stories like that and, once planted, they flourish. But when I heard reports of sounds, of the moaning of a spirit in agony, I had my doubts and I decided to investigate.

One night I take a flashlight and go through the dimly lit halls to Gallery 18. The low-watt ceiling bulb catches the painted eyes and makes me uncomfortable. Resolutely I take down the painting. Its gilt frame is heavy and it thuds to the floor. Dewey, the night watchman, hears it. He comes thumping through the galleries and arrives out of breath.

"Oh—Dr. Nearing," he says.

I have my flashlight trained on the back of the picture, and I motion to him. "Come here," I say, "and look at this." He does so, and I glance at him. "Well?" I prompt. "What do you think it is?"

"It's some kind of a mechanism," he says. "A spring. You can wind it up, and that thing—" he points to a small rasplike piece—"it rubs along the canvas and makes a noise. I guess that there diaphragm picks it up and magnifies it. That's how the groans are produced."

"Talking dolls use more or less the same mechanism," I say.

Dewey makes no comment, but I realize he's been much too clever in figuring out how this works. I decide to accuse him directly.

"Who pays you to wind this up?" I ask.

Dewey doesn't answer. "I could fire you for this," I remind him, "but if you tell me who it is, you can stay on."

Dewey isn't sure he can trust me, but he has no choice. "Mr. St. John," he mumbles.

I am not surprised. St. John has a good thing here. He constructed the groaning mechanism and he'd probably been responsible for the story

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of the portrait concealing a secret. The legend has made him famous.

I tell Dewey to hang the picture again. "No point in talking about this," I say. "Let's leave things as they are. Okay?"

"Yes, sir," he says, and I return to my office . . .

A month goes by. The moans continue, although less often. I am told that La Flama has visited the museum several times, as have both St. John and Anders. All three come alone and study the portrait, but I neither see nor speak to any of them.

The crowds are beginning to thin out. I'm worried about the drop in attendance, and now that nothing has happened, people are losing interest in the portrait. But I am more fascinated than ever, and I try to avoid looking at the painting. But I cannot.

I visit it regularly, after hours, and one night I make a discovery that disturbs me. I have a flashlight with me, and in its oblique light I discern something pushing through the bluish background. A message? But it is still too vague.

I go there the next night, and the night after that, and gradually I can distinguish that yellowish letters are emerging, and that the second one is a W. There are three or four more letters, but whether the name will turn out to be Swithin or Ewald, only time will tell. And, while up to now no one else has noticed the emerging word, it will soon be all too obvious.

The museum has a photograph of the painting, which is routine with all exhibits, but I take a series of color films with my own camera. I hope that when I develop the roll I'll be able to trace the day by day emergence of the writing.

I come home one night around midnight. A cop is waiting for me and he tells me they want me back at the museum.

"What for?" I ask.

"They'll tell you when you get there."

"Look," I say. "I'm not going unless you tell me why. I don't have to go, do I?"

"Mister," he says, "aren't you a little curious?"

I am, so I go with him.

There are a half dozen patrol cars in front of the museum and a couple of emergency vehicles. The cop I'm with takes me inside. There are more police in the lobby, and they ask me to wait for Inspector Rogers.

He is a dapper little man and he is strictly business. His voice crackles and his words bite, and the way he pronounces my name rubs me all wrong.

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"Dr. Nearing?" he says. "Somebody hacked up the painting of the Anders woman, and we want to know who did it and why. So tell us."

"Hacked it?"

"That's what I said. Into ribbons. With a knife."

I need time to think this out. I know why it was mutilated, but I'm not ready to talk about it. "May I go see the painting?" I ask.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Dr. Nearing, I'm running this and I ask the questions. So who would do a thing like that, and why?"

"What else happened?" I ask. "All these police, the cars outside—you're not that interested in vandalism, are you?"

"A watchman got killed," he says. "Knifed. Name of Dewey."

Murder. That changes everything, and I withhold nothing. I tell Rogers about the groaning mechanism in the back of the picture and about the yellowish letters beginning to appear.

"I'll send the pieces up to the lab," he says. "They'll put them together, and then they can bring out the full name. Just a matter of chemistry."

"And then what?" I say. "St. John and Anders hate each other and each of them would love to see a murder charge brought against the other. The name you find will merely prove the existence of the grudge. So where will you get with your chemistry?"

"Just leave that to us," Rogers says.

I glare at him but he merely nods, thanks me, and trots off. Interview over. I stand there and think of what the loss of the painting means. Dwindling crowds, dwindling revenue. If only—

I get a brainstorm, and the idea is so good I don't want to lose another minute. I go to my office and I call Jacobus.

Jacobus is a Dutch artist who does work for us. He was trained in the best European tradition. He knows paints and techniques. He can imitate a Rembrandt or a Velasquez or a Cezanne, and we use him to restore and touch up. He can duplicate a glaze or a varnish that was used 200 years ago, and do it in such a way that it will age at the same rate as the rest of the picture. So why can't Jacobus reproduce the portrait of Evelyn Anders?

Over the phone at this hour of the night it takes him a minute or so to wake up. When I explain what I want he asks me if I have a color photograph. I say I have one that I took yesterday, but the film is still in my camera.

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That's fine with him. His hobby is photography. He tells me to bring the camera, he'll develop the film, and he'll have the duplicate portrait ready within a day or two. I bring him the camera, then go home to bed.

I wake up early and prepare my publicity release. I state that the painting was miraculously saved, that it will be on display later this week. I say that personally I don't believe any name will appear, that I don't think the secret of who killed Evelyn Anders is actually in the painting, but that nevertheless we, the museum officials, are watching the portrait closely.

I figure that my announcement will pull in crowds, and I arrange for extra guards to handle the expected mob. But what I don't foresee is that Rogers will come down on my neck.

He doesn't call me personally and doesn't ask when I'll be in my office. Instead, a police sergeant phones and informs me that Rogers is on his way and I'm to stay put.

He doesn't bother even to say hello. As he walks through my doorway he's asking me what the hell the idea is. I tell him I'm running this museum and I don't have to explain anything to him.

"You're trying to use a homicide to attract a crowd," he says. "Suppose I call a press conference this afternoon and expose your publicity stunt and say we have the painting in the lab right now, and that you're a fraud."

I give in and tell him about Jacobus, and Rogers does a complete about-face. "I'd like to work with you on that idea," he says. "But first, I'd better bring you up to date on where the investigation stands."

According to Rogers, the killer managed to hide somewhere, perhaps in a closet, when the museum was cleared for the night. He waited until about seven o'clock before he went to Gallery 18. Then he took down the painting and began methodically to cut it up. He was doing a good job of shredding it when he heard Dewey approach. The killer probably stepped to one side of the doorway to Gallery 18. When Dewey came through, the killer knifed him without warning. No sign of a struggle. And when Dewey failed to report in at the conclusion of his regular round, the alarm was sounded, but by that time the killer had escaped. Unseen and unheard.

The police had taken the shambles of the painting and laboriously pasted the pieces on

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a new canvas. The area with the emerging letters was in ribbons, and it was impossible to develop the individual letters. Nevertheless, the laboratory men analyzed the paint scrapings. They are experienced at this—they are constantly analyzing scraps of paint collected from automobile accidents. They did it spectrographically and have discovered that, although the main background of the portrait was a Prussian-blue oil, the area where the letters were beginning to appear was a phthalocyanine blue, which has a tendency to oxidize after a few months of exposure to air. Furthermore, the phthalocyanine letters were painted directly onto the finished canvas, and not overpainted at any later time.

"Then you have St. John cold," I say. "You've spoken to him, haven't you?"

Rogers shakes his head. "Not yet. He left town this morning, but I'm having him brought back. I expect to talk to him later on today."

"Well," I remark, "he's the only one who could have painted in the name, so it has to be Ewald's. Right? He wouldn't paint in his own."

Again Rogers doesn't answer. Instead, he asks a question of his own.

"Where is that reproduction of Jacobus'?" he says. "I'd like to see it."

"It hasn't come in yet," I say. "When it does it will have to hang a few days. I can't exhibit it until the smell of fresh paint goes away. And as for the name, all Jacobus can do is copy the blur that was there yesterday. And believe me, except for that one clear letter, W—it was just a blur."

Rogers gets up and leaves. I have some outside appointments, so I leave, too, but I can't get my mind off the Jacobus copy. Suddenly I wonder exactly what that photograph of mine revealed—the one I gave to Jacobus. For camera lenses sometimes bring out what the eye can't see, and Jacobus undoubtedly reproduced whatever the camera revealed.

I phone my office. Jacobus has delivered the painting and it's hanging where the old one used to. For some reason that information sets off a train of thought and now, perhaps for the first time, I think the case through, carefully and logically, and I conclude that there is only one person who could have engineered the murders of both Evelyn Anders and Dewey. But how to prove it?

I'm nervous. I think of Dewey last night. I wonder if it can happen again. The killer

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must have read that the picture will be shown soon. Does the killer believe that the original has been reconstructed, or does the killer suspect a hoax?

I phone my secretary and I order four of the guards to stay on after the museum has closed. I leave instructions for them to patrol in pairs and to be armed. My secretary suggests that we keep the lights on all night, but I veto the suggestion.

I return to the museum about 7:00 p.m. and immediately take a flashlight and head for Gallery 18. I don't want the guards to know what I'm doing, so I take off my shoes and walk silently. As I go through the deserted rooms I realize that the guards are not too fond of patrolling. I see no one. I have an eerie feeling—the museum has never seemed so deserted, so utterly quiet.

I make the turn into Gallery 18. I see a figure in front of the Anders portrait. An arm is raised, a knife slashes down and glints in the dim light.

Perhaps I make a noise. More likely some sixth sense warns that figure in black. It turns, sees me. For a fraction of a second it hesitates. Then the figure launches itself at me. It leaps like a panther, silent and deadly. I yell, switch on my flashlight, and jump aside. The beam of the light is blinding. I throw the flashlight at the knife and start to run.

My yell has been heard. Somebody turns on the main lights, and the small lithe figure of a woman comes into view. She swerves, she is no longer bent on killing me. She has to escape, but the maze of galleries confuses her; she dashes to the left and finds herself at a dead end.

She whirls and speeds off like a projectile. Three guards are waiting for her. She leaps high—on the stage she seemed to have soared ten, fifteen feet, but it was an illusion. She hurls herself and lands squarely on a burly guard. The knife clatters, and three men grab La Flama and hold her down. She screams at them in Spanish. I turn around, head for my office, and call the police.

Later on I speak to Rogers. "I guessed it was La Flama," I say, "because of the Dewey murder. He was old and slow, so why kill him when anybody could have easily escaped in the semidarkness knowing that Dewey's identification would be shaky at best? But there was enough light for him to tell the difference between a man and a woman, and if Dewey had been left alive to identify the vandal as a woman, La Flama was lost. So she had to kill him.

"As for the murder of

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Evelyn Anders, here was La Flama with fifty million dollars at stake, and Evelyn in the way. La Flama could climb like a monkey. So—kill Evelyn, and Anders would be free to marry."

Rogers agreed. "We've been looking for La Flama ever since this afternoon, when I spoke to St. John. He told me that Anders had refused to divorce his wife. *She* wanted a divorce, she wanted to be free of his domination, but he refused because she was his protection against designing women who wanted to marry him for his money. And La Flama was shrewd, designing, and ruthless.

"St. John had a strong suspicion that La Flama had killed Evelyn, but he had no evidence, no proof. So after the murder and before he delivered the painting, he painted in her name, hoping that between her guilt and her deeply ingrained peasant's superstition she'd eventually get scared and give herself away."

"But he didn't paint her name in," I say. "The letter was a W—remember?"

"A W is an M," Rogers says, "when it's upside down. And that's how St. John painted it—upside down. Because everything he ever did was evasive and roundabout. He was afraid to accuse La Flama openly—he could only bring himself to do it indirectly, upside down."

"M? Of course! La Flama's real name—Marguerita."

And I make a notation on my pad to instruct Jacobus to paint in an M so that people can read it clearly. And when the meaning of the initial is revealed, won't that increase our attendance!

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the *NEWEST* Calder-and-Behrens story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

Hip, hip, hooray! Messrs. Calder and Behrens, the two quiet, dignified, seemingly sedate English country squires, are back and once again pursuing their undercover roles. The two master counterspies are looking for a secret agent, planted in a "primitive" Norfolk village, in an atmosphere of superstitions, coincidences, animal magnetism, miracles, menace, and mystery . . . This is the first of a new series . . .

THE AFRICAN TREE BEAVERS

by MICHAEL GILBERT

Like many practical and unimaginative men, Mr. Calder believed in certain private superstitions. He would never take a train which left at one minute to the hour; he distrusted the number 29; and he refused to open any parcel or letter on which the stamp had been fixed upside down. This, incidentally, once saved his life when he refused to open an innocent-looking parcel bearing the imprint of a bookseller from whom he had made many purchases in the past but which proved, on this occasion, to contain three ounces of tritoluene and a contact fuse. Mr. Behrens sneered at the superstition, but agreed that his friend had been lucky.

Mr. Calder also believed in coincidences. To be more precise, he believed in a specific law of coincidence. If you heard a new name, or a hitherto unknown fact, twice within twelve hours you would hear it a third time before another twelve hours was up. Not all the schoolmasterly logic of Mr. Behrens could shake Mr. Calder in his belief.

If challenged to produce an example, Mr. Calder would cite the case of the Reverend Francis Osbaldestone. The first

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time he heard the name was at eleven o'clock one night, at the Old Comrades Reunion of the Infantry Regiment with which he had fought for a memorable eight months in the Western Desert in 1942. He attended these reunions once every three years. His real interest was not in reminiscence of the war, but in observation of what had taken place since. It delighted him to see that a Motor Transport Corporal, whom he remembered slouching round in a pair of oily denims, should have become a prosperous garage proprietor, and that the Orderly Room Clerk, who had sold places on the leave roster, had developed his talents, first as a bookmaker's runner and now as a bookmaker; and that the God-like Company Sergeant Major should have risen no higher than commissionaire in a block of flats at Putney, who would be forced, if he met him in ordinary life, to call his former clerk, "sir."

Several very old friends were there. Freddie Faulkner, who had stayed on in the army and had risen to command the Battalion, surged through the crowd and pressed a large whiskey into his hand. Mr. Calder accepted it gratefully. One of the penalties of growing old, he had found, was a weak bladder for beer. Colonel Faulkner shouted, above the roar of conversation, "When are you going to keep your promise?"

"What promise?" said Mr. Calder. "How many whiskies *is* this? Double or triple?"

"I thought I'd get you a fairly large one. It's difficult to get near the bar. Have you forgotten? You promised to come and look me up."

"I hadn't forgotten. It's difficult to get away."

"Nonsense. You're a bachelor. You can up-sticks whenever you like."

"It's difficult to leave Rasselas behind."

"That dog of yours? For God's sake. Where do you think I live? In Hampstead Garden Suburb? Bring him with you. He'll have the time of his life. He can chase anything that moves, except my pheasants."

"He's a very well-behaved dog," said Mr. Calder, "and does exactly what I tell him. If you really want me—"

"Certainly I do. Moreover I can introduce Rasselas to another animal lover. Our rector, Francis Osbaldestone. A remarkable chap. Now get your diary out and fix a date—"

It was at ten o'clock on the following morning when the name cropped up next. Mr. Calder was stretched in a chair in front of his fire, his eyes

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shut, nursing the lingering remains of a not disagreeable hangover. Mr. Behrens was in the other chair, reading the Sunday newspapers. Rasselas occupied most of the space between them.

Mr. Behrens said, "Have you read this? It's very interesting. There's a clergyman who performs miracles."

"The biggest miracle any clergyman can perform nowadays," said Mr. Calder sleepily, "is to get people to come to church."

"Oh, they come to *his* church all right. Full house every Sunday. Standing room only."

"How does he do it?"

"Personal attraction. He's equally successful with animals. However savage or shy they are, he can make them come to him and behave themselves."

"He ought to try it on a bull."

"He has. Listen to this. *On one occasion a bull got loose and threatened some children who were picnicking in a field. The rector, who happened to be passing, quelled the bull with a few well-chosen words. The children were soon taking rides on the bull's back.*"

"Animal magnetism."

"I suppose, if you'd met St. Francis of Assisi, you'd have said, 'animal magnetism'."

"He was a Saint."

"How do you know this man isn't?"

"He may be. But it would need more than a few tricks with animals to convince me."

"Then what about miracles? *On another occasion the rector was wakened on a night of storm by an alarm of fire. The verger ran down to the rectory to tell the rector that a barn had been struck by lightning. The telephone line to the nearest village with a fire brigade was down. The rector said, 'Not a moment to lose. The bells must be rung.' And as he spoke the bells started to ring.*"

Mr. Calder snorted.

"It's gospel truth. Mr. Penny, the verger, vouches for it. He says that by the time he got back to his cottage, where the only key of the bell chamber is kept, and got across with it to the church, the bells had *stopped* ringing. He went up into the belfry. There was no one there. The ropes were on their hooks. Everything was in perfect order. At that moment the fire brigade arrived. They had heard the bells and were just in time to save the barn."

Mr. Calder said, "It sounds like a tall story to me. What do you think, Rasselas?" The dog showed his long white teeth in a

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smile. "He agrees with me. What is the name of this miracle worker?"

"He is the Reverend Francis Osbaldestone."

"Rector of Hedgeborn, in the heart of rural Norfolk?"

"Do you know him?"

"I heard his name for the first time at about ten o'clock last night."

"In that case," said Mr. Behrens, "according to the fantastic rules propounded and believed in by you, you will hear it again before ten o'clock this evening."

It was at this precise moment that the telephone rang.

Since Mr. Calder's telephone number was not only unlisted but changed every six months, his incoming calls were likely to be matters of business. He was not surprised, therefore, to recognize the voice of Mr. Fortescue, who was the Manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank, and other things besides.

Mr. Fortescue said, "I'd like to see you and Behrens as soon as possible. Shall we say, tomorrow afternoon?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Calder. "Can you give me any idea what it's about?"

"You'll find it all in your *Observer*. An article about a clergyman who performs miracles. Francis Osbaldestone."

"Ah!" said Mr. Calder.

"You sound pleased about something," said Mr. Fortescue suspiciously.

Mr. Calder said, "You've just proved a theory."

"I understand," said Mr. Fortescue, "that you knew Colonel Faulkner quite well, in the army."

"He was my Company Commander," said Mr. Calder.

"Would you say he was an imaginative man?"

"I should think he's got about as much imagination as a Number Eleven bus."

"Or a man who would be easily deluded?"

"I'd hate to try."

Mr. Fortescue pursed his lips primly and said, "That was my impression, too. Do you know Hedgeborn?"

"Not the village. But I know that part of Norfolk. It's fairly primitive. The army had a battle school near there during the war. They were a bit slow about handing it back, too."

"I seem to remember," said Mr. Behrens, "that there was a row about it. Questions in Parliament. Did they give it back in the end?"

"Most of it. They kept Snettisham Manor, with its park. After all the trouble at

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Porton Experimental Station they moved the poison gas section down to Cornwall and transferred the Bacterial Warfare Wing to Snettisham, which is less than two miles from Hedgeborn."

"I can understand," said Mr. Calder, "that Security would keep a careful eye on an establishment like Snettisham. But why should they be alarmed by a saintly rector two miles down the valley?"

"You are not aware of what happened last week?"

"Ought we to be?"

"It has been kept out of the press, but it's bound to leak out sooner or later. Your saintly rector led what I can only describe as a village task force. It was composed of the members of the Parochial Church Council and two dozen or so of the villagers and farmers. They broke into Snettisham Manor."

"But, good God," said Mr. Calder, "the security arrangements must have been pretty ropey."

"The security was adequate. A double-wire fence, patrolling guards and dogs. The village blacksmith cut the fence in two places. A farm tractor dragged it clear. They had no trouble with the guards, who were armed only with truncheons. The farmers had shotguns."

"And the dogs?"

"They made such a fuss over the rector that he was, I understand, in some danger of being licked to death."

"What did they do when they got in?" said Behrens.

"They broke into the experimental wing and liberated twenty rabbits, a dozen guinea pigs, and nearly fifty rats."

Mr. Behrens started to laugh, but managed to turn it into a cough when he observed Mr. Fortescue's eyes on him.

"I hope you don't think it was funny, Behrens. A number of the rats had been infected with Asiatic plague. They *hope* they recaptured or destroyed the whole of that batch."

"Has no action been taken against the rector?"

"Naturally. The police were informed. An Inspector and a Sergeant drove over from Thetford to see the rector. They were refused access."

"Refused?"

"They were told," said Mr. Fortescue gently, "that if they attempted to lay hands on the rector they would be resisted—by force."

"But surely—" said Mr. Behrens. And stopped.

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue. "Do think before you say anything. Try to visualize the unparalleled propaganda value to our friends in the various

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C.N.D. and Peace Groups if an armed force had to be dispatched to seize a village clergyman."

Mr. Behrens said, "I'm visualizing it. Do you think one of the more enterprising bodies —the International Brotherhood Group occurs to me as a possibility—might have planted someone in Hedgeborn? Someone who is using the rector's exceptional influence—"

"It's a possibility. You must remember that the Bacterial Warfare Wing has only been there for two years. If anyone *has* been planted, it has been done comparatively recently."

"How long has the rector been there?" said Mr. Calder.

"For eighteen months."

"I see."

"The situation is full of possibilities, I agree. I suggest you tackle it from both ends. I should suppose, Behrens, that there are few people who know more about the International Brotherhood Group and its ramifications than you do. Can you find out whether they have been active in this area recently?"

"I'll do my best."

"We can none of us do more than our best," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "And you, Calder, must go down to Hedgeborn immediately. I imagine Colonel Faulkner would invite you?"

"I have a standing invitation," said Mr. Calder. "For the shooting."

Hedgeborn has changed in the last 400 years, but not very much. The Church was built in the reign of Charles the Martyr and the Manor in the reign of Anne the Good. There is a village smithy, where a farmer can still get his horses shoed; he can also buy diesel oil for his tractor. The cottages have thatched roofs, and television aerials.

Mr. Calder leaned out of his bedroom window at the Manor and surveyed the village, asleep under a full moon. He could see the church at the far end of the village street, perched on a slight rise, its bell tower outlined against the sky. There was a huddle of cottages round it. The one with a light in it would belong to Mr. Penny, the verger, who had come running down the street to tell the rector that Farmer Allen's farm was on fire. If he leaned out of the window Mr. Calder could just see the roof of the rectory, at the far end of the street, masked by trees. Could there be any truth in the story of the bells? It had seemed fantastic in London. It seemed less so in this forgotten backwater village.

A soft knock at the door heralded the arrival of Stokes,

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once Colonel Faulkner's batman, now his factotum.

"I was to ask if you'd care for anything before you turned in, sir. Some biscuits, or a nightcap?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Calder. "Not after that lovely dinner. Did you cook it yourself?"

Stokes looked gratified. "It wasn't what you might call hote kweezeen."

"It was excellent. Tell me, don't you find things a bit quiet down here? Dull?"

"You see, sir, I'm used to it. I was born here."

"I didn't realize that," said Mr. Calder.

"I saw you looking at the smithy this afternoon. Enoch Clavering's my first cousin. Come to that, we're mostly first or second cousins. Allens and Stokes and Vowles and Claverings."

"It would have been Enoch who cut down the fence at Snettisham Manor?"

"That's right, sir." Stokes's voice was respectful, but there was a hint of wariness in it. "How did you know about that, if you don't mind me asking? It hasn't been in the newspapers."

"The Colonel told me."

"Oh, of course. All the same, I do wonder how *he* knew about Enoch cutting down the fence. He wasn't with us."

"With *you*," said Mr. Calder. "Do I gather, Stokes, that you took part in this—this enterprise?"

"Well, naturally, sir. Seeing I'm a member of the Parochial Church Council. Would there be anything more?"

"Nothing more," said Mr. Calder. "Good night."

He lay awake for a long time, listening to the owls talking to each other in the elms.

"It's true," said Colonel Faulkner next morning. "We are a bit inbred. All Norfolk men are odd. It makes us just a bit odder, that's all."

"Tell me about your rector."

"He was some sort of missionary, I believe. In darkest Africa. Got malaria very badly and was invalided out."

"From darkest Africa to darkest Norfolk. What do you make of him?"

The Colonel was lighting his after-breakfast pipe and took time to think about that. He said, "I just don't know, Calder. Might be a saint. Might be a scoundrel. He's got a 'touch' with animals. No denying that."

"What about the miracles?"

"No doubt they've been exaggerated in the telling. But—well, that business of the bells. I can give you chapter and verse for that. There *is* only one

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key to the bell chamber. I remember what a fuss there was when the key was mislaid last year. And no one could have got it from Penny's cottage, opened the tower up, rung the bells *and* put the key back without someone seeing him. Stark impossibility."

"How many bells rang?"

"The tenor and the treble. That's the way we always ring them for an alarm. One of the farmers across the valley heard them, spotted the fire, and phoned for the brigade."

"Two bells," said Mr. Calder thoughtfully. "So one man *could* have rung them."

"If he could have got in."

"Quite so." Mr. Calder was looking at a list. "There are three people I should like to meet. First, a man called Smedley."

"The rector's warden. I'm people's warden. He's my opposite number. Don't like him much."

"Then Miss Martin, your organist. I believe she has a cottage near the church. And Mr. Smallpiece, your village postmaster."

"Why those three?"

"Because," said Mr. Calder, "apart from the rector himself they are the only people who have come to live in this village during the past two years—so Stokes tells me."

"He ought to know," said the Colonel. "He's related to half the village."

Mr. Smedley lived in a small dark cottage. It was tucked away behind the Viscount Townshend pub, which had a signboard outside it with a picture of the Second Viscount looking remarkably like the turnip which had become associated with his name.

Mr. Smedley was old and thin and inclined to be cautious. He thawed very slightly when he discovered that his visitor was the son of Canon Calder of Salisbury.

"A world authority on monumental brasses," he said. "You must be proud of him."

"I'd no idea."

"Yes, indeed. I have a copy somewhere of a paper he wrote on the brasses at Verden, in Hanover. A most scholarly work. We have some fine brasses in the church here, too. Not as old or as notable as Stoke d'Abernon, but very fine."

"It's an interesting village altogether. You've been getting into the papers."

"I'd no idea that our brasses were *that* famous."

"Not your brasses. Your rector. He's been written up as a miracle worker."

"I'm not surprised."

"Oh, why?"

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Mr. Smedley blinked maliciously and said, "I'm not surprised at the ability of the press to cheapen anything it touches."

"But *are* they miracles?"

"You'll have to define your terms. If you accept the Shavian definition of a miracle as an act which creates faith, then certainly, yes. They are miracles."

It occurred to Mr. Calder that Mr. Smedley was enjoying this conversation more than he was. He said, "You know quite well what I mean. Is there a rational explanation for them?"

"Again, it depends what you mean by rational."

"I mean," said Mr. Calder bluntly, "are they miracles or just conjuring tricks?"

Mr. Smedley considered the matter, his head on one side. Then he said, "Isn't that a question which you should put to the rector? After all, if they *are* conjuring tricks, he must be the conjurer."

"I was planning to do just that," said Mr. Calder, and prepared to take his leave. When he was at the door his host checked him by laying a clawlike hand on his arm. He said, "Might I offer a word of advice? This is not an ordinary village. I suppose the word which would come most readily to mind is—primitive. I don't mean anything sinister. But being so isolated it has grown up rather more slowly than the outside world. And another thing—" Mr. Smedley paused. Mr. Calder was reminded of an old black crow, cautiously approaching a tempting morsel and wondering if he dared to seize it. "I ought to warn you that the people here are very fond of their rector. If what they regarded as divine manifestations were described by *you* as conjuring tricks—well, you see what I mean."

"I see what you mean," said Mr. Calder. He went out into the village street, took a couple of deep breaths, and made his way to the postoffice. This was dark, dusty, and empty. He could hear the postmaster, in the back room, wrestling with a manual telephone exchange. He realized, as he listened, that Mr. Smallpiece was no Norfolkman. His voice suggested that he had been brought up within sound of Bow Bells. When he emerged, Mr. Calder confirmed the diagnosis. If Mr. Smedley was a country crow, Mr. Smallpiece was a cockney sparrow.

He said, "Nice to see a new face around. You'll be staying with the Colonel. I 'ope his aunt gets over it."

"Gets over what?"

"Called away ten minutes ago. The old lady 'adder fit.

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Not the first one neither. If you ask me she 'as one whenever she feels lonely."

"Old people are like that," agreed Mr. Calder. "Your job must keep you very busy."

"Oh, I am the cook and the captain bold and the mate of the Nancy brig," agreed Mr. Smallpiece. "I work the telephone exchange—eighteen lines—deliver the mail, sell stamps, send telegrams, and run errands. 'Owever, there's no overtime in this job, and what you don't get paid for you don't get thanked for."

He looked at the clock above the counter which showed five minutes to twelve, pushed the hand forward five minutes, turned a card in the door from *Open* to *Closed*, and said, "Since the Colonel won't be back much before two, what price a pint at the Viscount?"

"You take the words out of my mouth," said Mr. Calder. As they walked down the street he said, "What happens if anyone wants to ring up someone while you're out?"

"Well, they can't, can they?" said Mr. Smallpiece.

When the Colonel returned—his aunt, Mr. Calder was glad to learn, was much better—Mr. Calder reported the negative results of his inquiries to date.

"If you want to see Miss Martin," said the Colonel, "you can probably kill two birds with one stone. She goes along to the rectory most Wednesdays, to practise the harmonium. You'll find it at the far end of the street. The original rectory was alongside the church, but it was burned down about a hundred years ago. I'm afraid it isn't an architectural gem. Built in the worst style of Victorian ecclesiastical red brick."

Mr. Calder, as he lifted the heavy wrought-iron knocker, was inclined to agree. The house was not beautiful. But it had a certain old-fashioned dignity and solidity. The rector answered the door himself. Mr. Calder had hardly known what to expect. A warrior ecclesiastic in the Norman mold? A fanatical priest, prepared to face stake and fire for his faith? A subtle Jesuit living by the Rule of Ignatius Loyola in solitude and prayer?

What Mr. Calder had not been prepared for was a slight nondescript man with an apologetic smile who said, "Come in, come in. Don't stand on ceremony. We never lock our doors here. I know you, don't I? Wait! You're Mr. Calder and you're staying at the Manor. *What* a lovely dog. A genuine Persian deerhound of the royal breed. What's his name?"

"He's called Rasselas."

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"Rasselas," said the rector. He wasn't looking at the dog, but was staring over his shoulder, as though he could see something of interest behind him in the garden. "Rasselas." The dog gave a rumbling growl. The rector said, "Rasselas," again, very softly. The rumble changed to a snarl. The rector stood perfectly still, and said nothing. The snarl changed back into a rumble.

"Well, that's much better," said the rector. "Did you see? He was fighting me. I wonder why."

"He's usually very well behaved with strangers."

"I'm sure he is. Intelligent, too. Why should he have *assumed* that I was an enemy? You heard him assuming it, didn't you?"

"I heard him changing his mind, too."

"I was able to reassure him. The interesting point is, why should he have started with hostile thoughts? I trust he didn't derive them from you. But I'm being fanciful. Why should you have thoughts about us at all? Come along in and meet our organist, Miss Martin. Such a helpful person and a spirited performer on almost any instrument."

The opening of an inner door had released a powerful blast of Purcell's overture to *Dido and Aeneas*, played on the harmonium with all stops out.

"Miss Martin. *MISS MARTIN!*"

"I'm so sorry, Rector. I didn't hear you."

"This is Mr. Calder. He's a wartime friend of Colonel Faulkner. Curious that such an evil thing as war should have produced the fine friendships it did."

"Good sometimes comes out of evil, don't you think?"

"No," said the rector. "I'm afraid I don't believe that at all. Good sometimes comes in spite of evil. A very different proposition."

"A beautiful rose," said Miss Martin, "can grow on a dunghill."

"Am I the rose and is Colonel Faulkner the dunghill, or vice versa?"

Miss Martin tittered. The rector said, "Let that be a warning to you not to take an analogy too far. I have to dash along now, but please stay—Miss Martin will do the honors. Have a cup of tea. You will? Splendid."

Over the teacups, as Mr. Calder was wondering how to bring the conversation round to the point he required, Miss Martin did it for him. She said, "This is a terrible village for gossip, Mr. Calder. Although you've hardly been down here

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two days, people are already beginning to wonder what you're up to. Particularly as you've been—you know—getting round, talking to people."

"I am naturally gregarious," said Mr. Calder.

"Now, now. You won't pull the wool over my eyes. I know better. You've been sent."

Mr. Calder said, trying to keep the surprise out of his voice, "Sent by whom?"

"I'll mention no names. We all know that there are sects and factions in the Church who would find our rector's teachings abhorrent to their own narrow dogma. And who would be envious of his growing reputation."

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Calder, relieved.

"I'm not asking you to tell me if my guess is correct. What I do want to impress on you is that there is nothing exaggerated in these stories. I'll give you one instance which I can vouch for myself. It was a tea party we were giving for the Brownies. I'd made a terrible miscalculation. The most appalling disaster faced us. *There wasn't enough to eat.* Can you imagine it?"

"Easily," said Mr. Calder.

"I called the rector aside and told him. He just smiled, and said, 'Look in that cupboard, Miss Martin.' I simply stared at him. It was a cupboard I use myself for music and anthems. I have the only key. The only key, I repeat. I walked over and unlocked the cupboard. And what do you think I found? A large plate of freshly cut bread and butter and two plates of biscuits."

"Enough to feed the five thousand."

"It's odd you should say that. It was the precise analogy that occurred to me."

"Did you tell people about this?"

"I don't gossip. But one of my helpers was there. She must have spread the story. Ah, here is the rector back. Don't say a word about it to him. He denies it all, of course."

"I'm glad to see that Miss Martin has been looking after you," said the rector. "A thought has occurred to me. Do you sing?"

"Only under duress."

"Recite, perhaps? We are getting up a village concert. Miss Martin is a tower of strength in such matters—"

"It would appear from his reports," said Mr. Fortescue to Mr. Behrens, "that your colleague is entering fully into the life of the village. Last Saturday, according to the *East Anglian Gazette*, he took part in a village concert in aid of the

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R.S.P.C.A. He obliged with a moving rendition of *The Wreck of the Hesperus.*"

"Good gracious," said Mr. Behrens. "How very versatile."

"He would not, however, appear to have advanced very far in the matter I sent him down to investigate. He thinks the rector is a perfectly sincere enthusiast. He has his eye on three people, any one of whom might have been planted in the village to work on the rector. Have you been able to discover anything?"

"I'm not sure," said Mr. Behrens. "I've made the round of our usual contacts. I felt that the International Brotherhood Group was the most likely. It's a line they've tried with some success in the past. Stirring up local prejudice and working it up into a national campaign. You remember the school-children who trespassed on the missile base at Loch Gair and were roughly handled?"

"Were alleged to have been roughly handled."

"Yes. It was a put-up job. But they made a lot of capital out of it. I have a line on their chief organizer. My contact thinks they *are* up to something. Which means they've got a secret agent planted in Hedgeborn."

"Or that the rector is their secret agent."

"Yes. The difficulty will be to prove it. Their security is rather good."

Mr. Fortescue considered the matter, running his thumb down the angle of his prominent chin. He said, "Might you be able to contrive, through your contact, to transmit a particular item of information to their agent in Hedgeborn?"

"I might. But I hardly see—"

"In medicine," said Mr. Fortescue, "I am told that when it proves impossible to clear up a condition by direct treatment it is sometimes possible to precipitate an artificial crisis which *can* be dealt with."

"Always bearing in mind that if we do precipitate a crisis, poor old Calder will be in the middle of it."

"Exactly," said Mr. Fortescue.

It was on Friday during the second week of his stay that Mr. Calder noticed the change. There was no open hostility. No one attacked him. No one was even rude to him. It was simply that he had ceased to be acceptable to the village.

People who had been prepared to chat with him in the bar of the Viscount Townshend now had business of their own to discuss whenever he appeared. Mr. Smedley did not

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answer his knock, although Mr. Calder could see him through the front window reading a book. Mr. Smallpiece avoided him in the street.

It was like the moment, in a theater, when the safety curtain descends, cutting off the actors and all on the stage from the audience. Suddenly he was on one side and the village was on the other.

By Saturday the atmosphere had become so oppressive that Mr. Calder decided to do something about it. Stokes had driven the Colonel into Thetford on business. He was alone in the house. He decided, on the spur of the moment, to have a word with the rector.

Although it was a fine afternoon the village street was completely empty. As he walked he noted the occasional stirring of a window curtain and he knew he was not unobserved, but the silence of the early-autumn afternoon lay heavily over everything. On this occasion he had left a strangely subdued Rasselas behind.

His knock at the rectory door was unanswered. Remembering the rector saying, "We never lock our doors here," he turned the handle and went in. The house was silent. He took a few steps along the hall, then stopped. The door on his left was ajar. He looked in. The rector was there. He was kneeling at a carved prie-dieu, as motionless as if he had been himself part of the carving. If he had heard Mr. Calder's approach he took absolutely no notice of it. Feeling extremely foolish, Mr. Calder withdrew by the way he had come.

Walking back down the street he was visited by a recollection of his days with the Military Mission in wartime Albania. The mission had visited a remote village and had been received with the same silent disregard. They had usually been well received, and this time it puzzled them. When he returned to the village some months later Mr. Calder learned the truth. The village had caught an informer and were waiting for the mission to leave before they dealt with him. He had heard the details of what they had done to the informer, and although he was not naturally queasy it had turned his stomach.

That evening Stokes waited on them in unusual silence. When he had gone, the Colonel said, "Whatever it is, it's tomorrow."

"How do you know?"

"I'm told that the rector has been fasting since Thursday. Also that morning service tomorrow has been canceled, and Evensong brought forward

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to four o'clock. That's when it'll break."

"It will be a relief," said Mr. Calder.

"Stokes thinks you ought to leave tonight. He thinks I shall be all right, but you might not be."

"That was thoughtful of Stokes. But I'd as soon stay. That is, unless you want to get rid of me."

"Glad to have you," said the Colonel. "Besides, if they see you've gone they may put it off. Then we shall have to start all over again."

"Did you make contact with the number I asked you to?"

"Yes. From a public phone booth in Thetford."

"And what was the answer?"

"It was so odd," said the Colonel, "that I was afraid I might get it wrong, so I wrote it down." He handed Mr. Calder a piece of paper.

Mr. Calder read it carefully, folded it up, and put it in his pocket.

"Is it good news or bad?"

"I'm not sure," said Mr. Calder. "But I can promise you one thing. You'll hear a sermon tomorrow which you won't forget."

When the rector stepped into the pulpit his face was pale and composed, but it was no longer gentle. Mr. Calder wondered how he could ever have considered him nondescript. There was a blazing conviction about the man, a fire that lit up the whole church. This was no longer the gentle St. Francis. This was Peter the Hermit, "whose eyes were a flame and whose tongue was a sword."

He stood for a moment, upright and motionless. Then he turned his head slowly, looking from face to face in the crowded congregation, as if searching for support and guidance from his flock. When he started to speak it was in a quiet, almost conversational voice.

"The anti-Christ has raised his head once more. The Devil is at his work again. We deceived ourselves into thinking that we had dealt him a shrewd blow. We were mistaken. Our former warning has not been heeded. I fear that it will have to be repeated, and this time more strongly."

The Colonel looked anxiously at Mr. Calder, who mouthed the word, "Wait."

"Far from abandoning its foul work at Snettisham Manor, I have learned that it is not only continuing, but intensifying it. More of God's creatures are being imprisoned in its cells and tortured by methods which would have shamed the Gestapo. In the name of science,

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mice, small rabbits, guinea pigs, and hamsters are being put to obscene and painful deaths. Yesterday a cargo of African tree beavers, harmless and friendly little animals, arrived at this—at this scientific slaughter-house. They are to be inoculated with a virus which will first paralyze their limbs, then cause them to go mad with pain, and finally to die. The object of the experiment is to hold off the moment of death as long as possible—"

Mr. Calder, who was listening with strained attention to every word, had found it difficult to hear the closing sentence and realized that the rector was now speaking against a ground swell of noise which burst out suddenly into a roar. The rector's voice rode over the tumult like a trumpet.

"Are we going to allow this?"

A second roar crashed out with startling violence.

"We will pull down this foul place stone by stone! We will purge what remains with fire! All who will help, follow me."

"What do we do?" said the Colonel.

"Sit still," said Mr. Calder.

In a moment they were alone in their pew with a hundred angry faces round them. The rector, still standing in the pulpit, quelled the storm with an upraised hand. He said, "We will have no bloodshed. We cannot fight evil with evil. Those who are not with us are against us. Enoch, take one of them. Two of you the other. Into the vestry with them."

Mr. Calder said, "Go with it. Don't fight."

As they were swirled down the aisle the Colonel saw one anxious face in the crowd. He shouted, "Are you in this, too, Stokes?" The next moment they were in the vestry. The door had clanged shut and they heard the key turn in the lock. Thick walls and nine inches of stout oak cut off the sounds. They could hear the organ playing. It sounded like Miss Martin's idea of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic.* A shuffling of feet. A door banging. Then silence.

"Well," said the Colonel. "What do we do now?"

"We give them five minutes to get to the rectory. There'll be some sort of conference there, I imagine."

"And then?"

Mr. Calder had seated himself on a pile of hassocks and sat there, swinging his short legs. He said, "As we have five minutes to kill, maybe I'd better put you in the picture. Why don't you sit down."

The Colonel grunted, and subsided.

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Mr. Calder said, "Hasn't it struck you that the miracles we've been hearing about were of two quite different types?"

"Don't follow you."

"One sort was simple animal magnetism. No doubt about that. I saw the rector operating on Rasselas. Nearly hypnotized the poor dog. The other sort—well, there's been a lot of talk about them, but I've heard real evidence of only two. The bells that rang themselves and the food that materialized in a locked cupboard. Isolate them from the general hysteria, and what do they amount to? You told me yourself that the bell-chamber key had once been mislaid."

"You think someone stole it? Had a duplicate made?"

"Of course."

"Who?"

"Oh," said Mr. Calder impatiently, "the person who organized the other miracle, of course. I think it's time we got out of here, don't you?"

"How?"

"Get someone to unlock the door. I notice they left the key in it on the other side. There must be some sane folk about. Not all the farmers were in church."

The Colonel said, "Seeing that the nearest farm likely to be helpful to us is a good quarter of a mile away, I'd be interested to know how you intend to shout for help."

"Follow me up that ladder," said Mr. Calder, "and I'll show you."

The rector said, "Is that clear? They'll be expecting us on the southern side, where we attacked before. So we'll come through the woods, on the north. Stokes, can you get the Colonel's Land Rover up that side?"

"Easily enough, Rector."

"Have the grappling irons laid out at the back. Tom's tractor follows you. Enoch, how long to cut the wire?"

"Ten seconds."

This produced a rumbling laugh.

"Good. We don't want any unnecessary delay. We drive the tractors straight through the gap and ride in on the back of them. The fire-raising material will be in the trailers behind the rear tractor. The Scouts can see to that under you, Mr. Smedley."

"Certainly, Rector. Scouts are experts at lighting fires. If we start upwind, that should give you time to get the animals out before the fires take hold."

"Excellent. Now, the diversion at the front gate. That will be under you, Miss Martin. You'll have the Guides and Brownies. You demand to be

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let in. When they refuse, you all start screaming. If you can get hold of the sentry I suggest you scratch him."

"I'll let Matilda Briggs do that," said Miss Martin. "She'll enjoy it."

Enoch Clavering touched the rector on the arm and said, "Listen." Then he went over to the window and opened it.

"What is it, Enoch?"

"I thought I heard the bells some minutes ago, but I didn't like to interrupt. They've stopped now. It's as it was last time. The bells rang themselves. What does it signify?"

"It means," said the rector cheerfully, "that I've been a duffer. I ought to have seen that the trap door to the belfry was padlocked. Our prisoners must have climbed up and started ringing the tenor and the treble. Since they've stopped, I imagine someone heard them and let them out."

Miss Martin said, "What are we going to do?"

"What we're not going to do is lose our heads. Stokes, you've immobilized the Colonel's car?"

Stokes nodded.

"And you've put the telephone line out of communication, Mr. Smallpiece?"

"Same as last time."

"Then I don't see how they can summon help in under half an hour. We should have ample time to do all we have to."

"I advise you against it," said Mr. Calder.

He was standing in the doorway, one hand in his pocket. He looked placid, but determined. Behind him they could see the great dog, Rasselas, his head almost level with Mr. Calder's shoulder, his amber eyes glowing.

For a moment there was complete silence. Then a low growl of anger broke out from the crowded room. The rector said, "Ah, Mr. Calder. I congratulate you on your ingenuity. Who let you out?"

"Jack Collins. And he's gone in his own car to Thetford. The police will be here in half an hour."

"Then they will be too late."

"That's just what I was afraid of," said Mr. Calder. "It's why I came down as fast as I could—to stop you."

There was another growl, louder and more menacing. Enoch Clavering stepped forward. He said, "Bundle him down into the cellar, Rector, and let's get on with it."

"I shouldn't try it," said Mr. Calder. His voice was still peaceful. "First, because if you put a hand on me this dog will have the hand off. Secondly, because the Colonel's outside in the garden. He's got a shotgun, and he'll use it if he has to."

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The rector said gently, "You mustn't think you can frighten us. The Colonel won't shoot. He's not a murderer. And Rasselas won't attack me. Will you, Rasselas?"

"You've got this all wrong," said Mr. Calder. "My object is to prevent *you* attacking us. Just long enough for me to tell you two things. First point, the guards at Snettisham have been doubled and they are armed. They have orders to shoot. What you're leading your flock to isn't a jamboree, like last time. It's a massacre."

"I think he's lying," said Mr. Smedley.

"There's one way of finding out," said Mr. Calder. "But it's not the real point. The question which really matters is this: have any of you ever seen a tree beaver?"

The question was so unexpected that it fell into a sudden pool of silence.

"Come, come," said Mr. Calder. "There must be some naturalists here. Rector, I see the *Universal Encyclopaedia of Wild Life* on your shelf. Would you care to turn its pages and give us a few facts about the habits of this very curious creature."

The rector said, with a half smile of comprehension on his face, "What are you getting at, Mr. Calder?"

"I can save you some unnecessary research. The animal does not exist. Indeed, it could not exist. Beavers live in rivers, not in trees. The animal was invented by an old friend of mine, a Mr. Behrens. And having invented this remarkable animal he thought it would be a pity to keep it all to himself. He had news of its arrival at Snettisham passed to a friend of his, who passed it on to a subversive organization known as the International Brotherhood Group. Who, in turn, passed it to you, Rector, *through their local agent.*"

The rector was smiling now. He said, "So I have been led up the garden path. *Sancta simplicitas!* Who is this agent?"

"That's easy. Who told you about the tree beavers?"

There was a flurry of movement. A shout, a crash, and the sound of a shot.

"It is far from clear," said Mr. Calder, "whether Miss Martin intended to shoot the rector or me. In fact Rasselas knocked her over and she shot herself. As soon as they realized they had been fooled, the village closed its ranks. They concocted a story that Miss Martin, who was nervous of burglars, was known to possess a revolver, a relic of the last war. She must have been

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carrying it in her handbag, and the supposition was that, in pulling it out to show it to someone, the gun went off and killed her. It was the thinnest story you ever heard, and the Coroner was suspicious as a cat. But he couldn't shake them. And after all, it *was* difficult to cast doubt on the evidence of the entire Parochial Church Council supported by their rector.

"The verdict was accidental death."

"Excellent," said Mr. Fortescue. "It would have been hard to prove anything. In spite of your tree beavers. How did the rector take it?"

"Very well indeed. I had to stay for the inquest and made a point of attending Evensong on the following Sunday. The church was so full that it was difficult to find a seat. The rector preached an excellent sermon on the text, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.'"

"A dangerous opponent," said Mr. Fortescue. "On the whole, I cannot feel sorry that the authorities should have decided to close Snettisham Manor."

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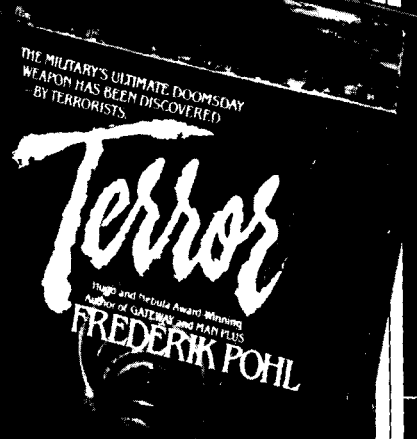
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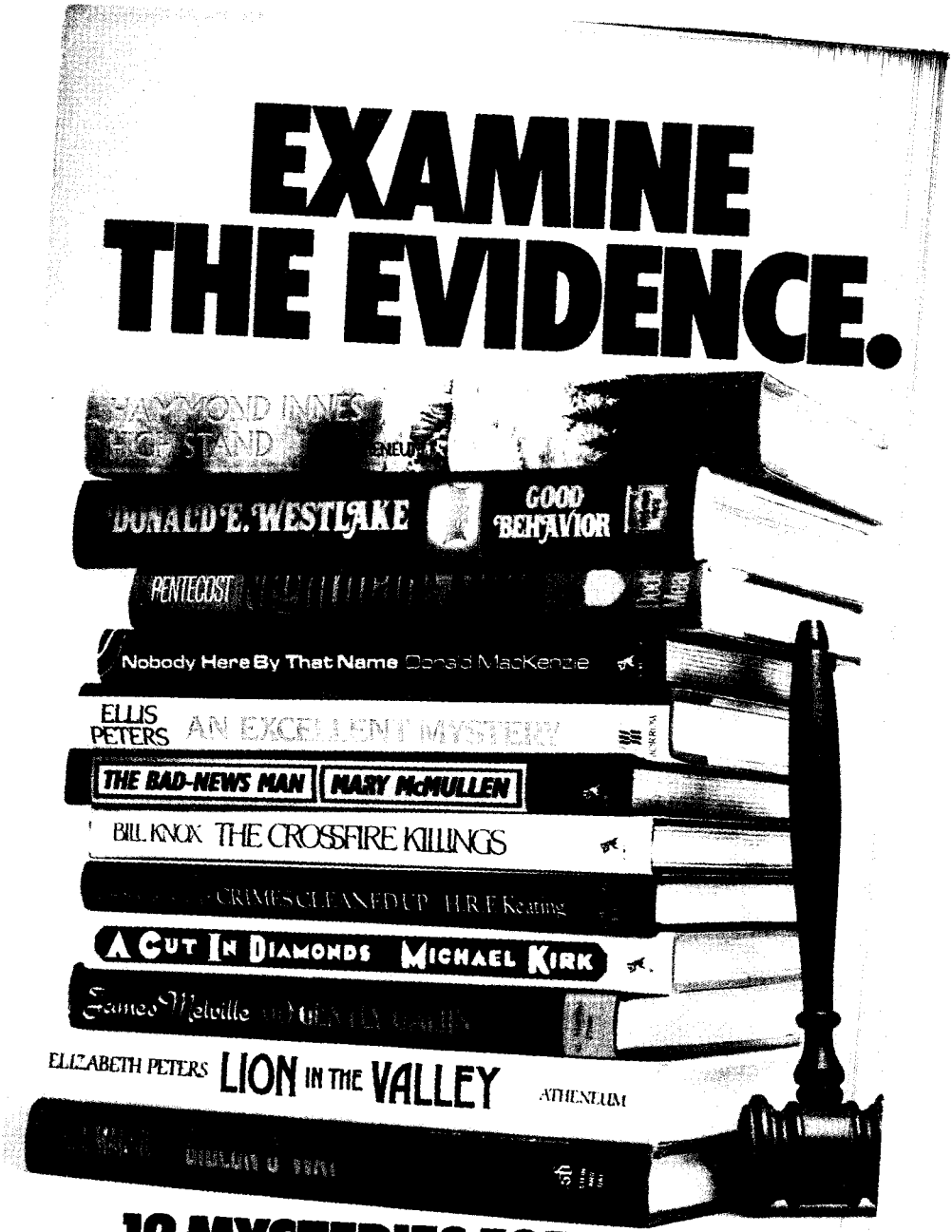

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